

## Churches Together in Eastcote: Chair's Report June 2020.

I have written more reports as Chair of CTE than I care to remember, but never one like this. Never one during a pandemic. As I write this some of our churches have just reopened for private prayer after 3 months' closure. Gatherings and services are not allowed and we have had no choice but to postpone our planned AGM. The experiences we have had over the last few months have been extraordinary, affecting every aspect of our lives, not least the opportunities to practise our faith in the ways which we had perhaps come to take for granted. The restrictions have been painful for all of us, particularly those who have not had access to online worship and communication. Yet never has our Christian faith and fellowship been more important than in the time of crisis and lockdown. I am hugely grateful, as I am sure we all are, to all who, through their care and concern, have worked so hard to enable us to remain connected to one another during times of isolation. Looking ahead now, and hoping that at some point soon we will be allowed to worship together again, albeit with some restrictions and changes, I am conscious that a proportion of our memberships will be unsure about coming back to church for health and vulnerability reasons. Maintaining contact with these people and supporting them will present an ongoing challenge for our churches.

Looking back to pre-Covid days, our AGM in June 2019 was a lovely occasion hosted by URC Northwood Hills. Following on from our Lent Course "Called to be Saints", representatives of our churches spoke about saints whose lives and examples were a particular inspiration for them. They made a great contribution to the service.

In the Autumn CTE said goodbye and thank you to Rev Chris Rankine as he left Eastcote to take up a new position in Fulham. We wished him all the best for the future.

In October the St Thomas More Folk Group hosted a musical and social evening to mark their 40 years of music-making in the community. All our churches were invited and those who attended enjoyed the evening very much. We are so grateful to the Folk Group for the contribution they have made over so many years to CTE occasions. Long may they continue to make their music. I know they are looking forward to re-starting as soon as regulations allow.

CTE was represented as usual at the Remembrance Service in Eastcote, with John Gay and Bill Smyth doing the honours, for which we extend our thanks.

Our United Carol Service took place at St Thomas More and was well received. We are particularly grateful to Lynita Conradie for the contribution she made to this service. A collection of £370 was taken up for The Passage.

Our Epiphany celebration, Follow the Star, was a little different this year as it included little dramas in each church, written by Anthony Inglese. There was a good all-age attendance and the occasion flowed smoothly. This is an event which is growing and developing and brings our members together in a special way.

Two Lent Groups, one at Eastcote Methodist Church and one at St Thomas More, embarked on the course "Lentwise" with around 30 participants. There was much enthusiasm for the materials and the sessions were going well, but the Covid 19 restrictions forced the groups to close prematurely.

The materials have come in very useful during the lockdown, though, and we have used the prayers in our home. The themes of guidance, sustenance and protection have been particularly resonant at this time. We have tried to keep in

touch with one another during lockdown and I have encouraged people to continue to pray together at the same time every week, so that we know that others are connected to us in prayer. This does make a difference.

Shortly before the lockdown, CTE held a united service at EMC entitled "Pause for Hope". This was a special event for all those affected by cancer, and it was an excellent service led by Lynita Conradie with contributions from other ministers. The timing was unfortunate, as attendance was lower than we would have hoped – understandably so given the circumstances – but the committee felt that we should repeat the service at some point in the future when more people are able to take part.

Christian Aid Week has been another victim of the virus, as street and door to door collections are not possible. The CTE committee has made a donation of £50 to Christian Aid in lieu of the practical support we would have given under normal circumstances.

Our plan for the AGM service was to invite a speaker from the Medaille Trust, a charity working to combat modern slavery. We have invited them to produce a video about their work which we can share amongst our members, and we will discuss options for further supporting their work, by inviting them to a future service should this be possible, or collecting for them at our Carol Service. It is not possible to make firm decisions at the moment. The Committee is holding an Extraordinary AGM virtual Meeting to accept the Chair and Finance reports which will then be made accessible to all the churches. We are not in a position yet to plan for a public AGM but this will be discussed once the mid-term future is clearer.

As always I am immensely grateful to all on the committee for their ongoing support and commitment, especially Tessa and Margaret for their specific roles in minuting and treasuring. We have had some committee changes; we were very sad to lose Meryl Davies, but delighted that she continues to support many of our activities while not officially on the committee. Thank you Meryl. Recently we have welcomed Fr John Seymour to St Lawrence and to CTE; in the short time he has been in Eastcote Fr John has made a positive contribution to our activities and discussions. Sadly we will be saying goodbye this Autumn to Liz Shaw as she begins her retirement. We thank you Liz for your support and friendship, and wish you all the best for the future.

As I conclude this report I am sure you will want to join me in praying for all who have been severely affected by these terrible times; all who have suffered illness and loss, who have been affected by loneliness and anxiety, who have lost their livelihoods and seen their plans in tatters, who face the future with concern and fear. May God in His mercy restore peace, hope and comfort wherever they are needed.

At the same time we thank God for the blessings that we have received during these times, especially the blessings of prayer, creativity, kindness, courage and support.