

## Churches Together in Eastcote Chair's Report July 2023.

It is my great pleasure and privilege to welcome you to this event – the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations for Churches Together in Eastcote. As this is a really significant occasion, I would like to devote some of my report to looking back over the last 30 years.

I remember when the idea of CTE was discussed, and I remember when it was inaugurated, in June 1993. Those were exciting times. There is a danger that we take it for granted that our churches are willing to work and worship together, and that the relationships among our communities are open, friendly and supportive. It was not always so. At the time when CTE was created, the ecumenical movement was fresh, strong and inspiring, in response to divisions and misunderstandings among the different Christian traditions which, we realised, were creating barriers to our mission. Some of our early meetings were devoted to session of panel question and answer, so that we could begin to know more about each other, and over the years, thanks to joint worship and growing friendships, we have developed a much greater understanding of, and respect for, one another.

I have recently returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land where I witnessed clear divisions not only at the political and faith level, but also among the different Christian denominations; Christians now make up a small minority of people in that part of the world, but they do not seem to find it easy to support or even accept one another. It made me realise how blest we are in this country, and how far we have come in Eastcote over the last 30 years, bringing us to this day when we can meet as true friends in this beautiful setting.

It has been my privilege to serve on the committee for 30 years and in that time I have met and worked with so many people from our member churches. Some of you are here today – thank you for coming. Others whom I have contacted are unable to join us but have sent messages of goodwill, among them Rev Sandy Williams who was our very first chair. On behalf of the churches, thank you to all of you for everything you have done to support the work of CTE through its journey to this moment.

There have been ups and downs, of course. We have had to stop to take stock, adjust our thinking and adapt to changing circumstances. We have also created wonderful memories, such as our joint Carol Services, our very successful Lent groups, our presence at some large Eastcote Christmas events, carols at Costa and at the Ascott, our joyous car park AGM after the lockdowns, our roving teddy bear – do you remember him? – our pirate pantomime afternoon and many other happy occasions.

The thing we have learned when facing challenges is that God will find a way forward if we open ourselves to His Spirit and trust in Him. That is something to sustain us as we reflect on a rather challenging year. We sponsored a clergy lunch, we held our usual Carol Service, and we ran three well-attended Lent groups, two of them led by Lynita. I must say a personal thank you to Lynita and Jill, for stepping in to lead when I was ill. But we have faced losses this year. When we were inaugurated, we were 5 churches. When St Andrews URC amalgamated with Northwood Hills, we had 4 member churches. This year Northwood Hills URC closed and moved to join St John's in Northwood, outside our borders. We are now 3 churches and have no URC representation, which is a very big change and loss for CTE. Laurie was the loyal URC representative on the committee for 9 years, and shortly after we said thank you to him for his support and hard work, we heard the

unexpected and very sad news of his passing. Laurie was a good friend to CTE and to many of us here today, and we feel his loss deeply. Today we remember him with affection and gratitude and we pray for him, for Janet and their family.

What lies ahead for CTE? We stand ready to do God's will, and we trust in Him that He will guide and enable us as He has for 30 years. Those of you who have served on the committee know how much hard work, dedication, patience and good will go into keeping CTE on the road, and the current committee members are no exception. I thank them for everything they do, for their loyalty, enthusiasm and support. I will not single people out, but you know how grateful I am. Looking ahead, we pray that God will keep sending workers to the vineyard. If any of you, hearing these words today, feels called and inspired to join us, please come forward. You will be most welcome.

Finally, to mark our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we have planted a wild cherry tree in Eastcote House Gardens, near the entrance off St Lawrence Drive. I hope you will be able to visit it and say a prayer. We could not have done this without the generous support of the Friends of Eastcote house Gardens, to whom we extend grateful thanks. You have a prayer card to commemorate today, and we ask you to keep it and to pray for us. With your support and prayers, who knows what CTE might achieve over the next 30 years?

Thank you to St Lawrence for hosting this occasion, to Ian for playing for us and to everyone who has helped with the setting up and the refreshments. I hope all of you will have a lovely time today.

Jane Inglese 25.6.23