

European Digest 2

NEW APPOINTMENT

Church of England representative to the European Institutions

The Revd Dr Gary Wilton has been appointed to the newly created post of Church of England's Representative to the EU Institutions. He will take up his post in Brussels in mid April 2008.

Since 2005 Gary has been a member of the Theology Dept at York St John University where he is currently Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Theology and Religious Studies. He has a long-standing interest in the interface between the Church and contemporary society and teaches Christian Ethics and Christian Mission and Ministry. Ordained deacon in 1988 and priest in 1989 in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, he was Director of Studies and then Associate Principal at Church Army's Wilson Carlile College from 1998-2005.

As the Church of England's Representative to the EU, Gary Wilton will be responsible to the Europe Bishops' Panel for promoting the Church's of England's engagement on European social, political and environment issues. Gary will be an Associate Staff Member of the Conference of European Churches' Church and Society Commission and a Canon to the Pro-Cathedral Church of Holy Trinity Brussels.

Commenting on his appointment, Gary Wilton said: "**The creation of this new post marks a significant development in the Church of England's relationship with the European Union.**

The move from academia to the rough and tumble of European policy development will be immensely challenging. The Church has important things to contribute to the life of the European Union - important things to say about how we should develop community, how we should relate to the wider world and how we should care for the planet. I am very excited about representing the Church of England to the EU Institutions and working alongside colleagues at the Conference of European Churches."

The Bishop of St Albans, the Rt Revd Christopher Herbert, who chairs the House of Bishops Europe Panel welcomed the appointment, saying: "It is really good to have been able to appoint Gary Wilton to this new post. The Church of England must continue to increase its role in Europe in partnership with other churches so that together we can play our part in helping to shape the Europe of the future."

CENTENARY OF ANGLICAN-GERMAN ECUMENICAL CONTACTS 1908/1909

The next two years will see the commemoration of an important milestone in the ecumenical movement, with the hundredth anniversary of the Anglo-German ecumenical contacts of 1908/1909 which focussed attention on the Christian call to work for peace against the backdrop of gathering international tension. In commemorating this contact, the churches have the opportunity to speak with a common voice on peace and reconciliation in our own time.

The Revd Dr Keith Clements, former General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, has been researching the fascinating and inspiring story of the 1908/1909 meetings and offers the following insights:

Peace and the Churches – an anniversary

The years 2008 and 2009 see a notable one hundredth anniversary for the churches of Britain and Germany. In May 1908 over 130 German church representatives – Protestant, Roman Catholic and Free Church – visited England and Scotland for over a week, and the following year a large British party similarly visited Germany. It was a time of rising tension and military competition between the two countries, and the exchange visits aimed to help the churches promote better understanding and peace between the two peoples.

A vision

The moving spirits of the visits were two lay Christians: on the British side, J. Allen Baker MP, a Quaker, and in Germany the Protestant Baron Eduard de Neufville. These visionaries mobilised the support of the church leaders of all confessions and denominations in both countries for what in its time was a pioneering ecumenical venture. Out of the visits grew a British-German body, "The Associated Councils in the British and German Empires for Fostering Friendly Relations between the two Peoples." This in turn stimulated the formation in 1914 of a still wider organisation, the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.

Tragedy – and new beginnings

The catastrophe of the First World War was of course a bitter blow to all these efforts. But if the pioneers had been unable to prevent the war, neither did the war destroy this movement for peace-building. Remarkably, not only did the British and German Councils continue to publish their journals during the war, but the World Alliance even managed to meet in neutral countries in Europe. After the Armistice the World Alliance quickly began work on reconciliation. It provided an important place of meeting for the former belligerents and other countries, and through the 1920s and 1930s it held many international meetings focusing on disarmament, human rights, religious freedom and the treatment of minorities. Alongside bodies like the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work it played an important role in the growing movement for Christian unity and continued in existence until the inauguration of the World Council of Churches in 1948.

Today

British and German churches now relate together in many ways and at various levels from parish, congregational and diocesan partnerships to formal inter-church agreements and common membership of the European and world ecumenical bodies. They look back on dark times of conflict and bitter feelings but are thankful for the ways in which so much reconciliation has come about. It is fitting, therefore, that during 2008-09 they should pause and mark the centenary of the pioneering venture that first called on the churches to challenge the growing culture of nationalistic militarism and to promote the things that make for peace, and which despite early setbacks was to bear fruit both for these two countries and for the wider world.

Celebration and renewed commitment – an invitation

In Britain and Germany, the anniversary is an opportunity to salute the pioneers, to celebrate our common journeying since then, and to undertake a renewed, shared commitment to peace-building amid the conflicts of today's world.

A number of initiatives in England and Germany are being planned - watch out for news of special commemorative events in 2008/2009!

10th INTERNATIONAL BONHOEFFER CONGRESS

The Chairman of the Congress writes,

“Many of you will know already that the 10th International Bonhoeffer Congress will take place in Prague, Czech Republic, 22-27 July 2008. The theme will be Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology in Today's World - a Way between Fundamentalism and Secularism? The theme will be treated not only by an impressive panel of plenary speakers beginning with the Professor Juergen Moltmann of Germany who will give the keynote address, but also in over thirty seminars on a wide variety of particular topics by scholars from many different parts of the world.

Those of you who are not, as yet, aware of the Congress but would like to have the full information about programme, accommodation, costs etc. are encouraged to consult the Congress website: www.bonhoeffercongress2008.cuni.cz

Thanks to the generosity of some donors we are able to offer a number of scholarships. Priority candidates for such bursaries will be participants, especially students, from Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. You are cordially invited to publicise this wherever you have contact with people whom you consider could qualify. Application forms may be obtained from the Congress office in Prague (see webpage, above).

Thank you in anticipation of your kindness in attending to this!”

CO-OPERATION WITH MUSLIMS IN EUROPE SHOULD BE INTENSIFIED



The Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe, established by the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and Conference of European Churches (CEC), has underlined the importance of seeking common ground with Muslim partners in Europe and entering into a sustainable and confidence building dialogue.

The committee consists of 20 members and consultants from Roman-Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches all over Europe - including Turkey - and is mandated to exchange experiences from the different parts of Europe, to advise the churches concerning Christian-Muslim affairs, to intensify co-operation with Muslim partners and to reflect the European integration process from an inter-religious perspective.

It welcomed the letter from 138 Muslim authorities "A Common Word Between Us and You" as a significant step in the history of Islam, a sincere sign of establishing good relations with the Christian churches and to stand together for a more peaceful and just world.

The committee intends to organise a pan-European conference together with Muslim partners in October 2008, possibly in Brussels, on the subject "Being a Citizen of Europe and a Person of Faith. Christians and Muslims as Active Partners in European Societies". CEC says that this conference will substantially contribute to the "European Year of the Intercultural Dialogue 2008". The next meeting of the committee in April 2008 in Hungary will include Muslim partners for a shared preparation of this conference.

MISSION CHALLENGE IN FINLAND

'We are not offering tricks, and we are not trying to woo people.'



In a recent press release the Evangelical Church in Finland reports that Church membership in Finland is close to 82% of the population. The report adds comments from Bishop Simo Peura of Lapua about the mission challenge to the Church:

“For Finns it is important to be close to the church at the critical turning points in a person's life: Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage and Christian Burial. Our members see that compassionate work and dialogue in support of lasting human values is essential,” Bishop Peura declared. “Its essence is the Church's founding word. The Grace of God is the kernel which the church can offer. Grace speaks to and touches people, and binds them to the Church. There's a deep need in humanity to be in contact with the Holy.”

The Lutheran church is considering its strategy up to 2015, and Bishop Peura leads the committee responsible. “We are not offering tricks, and we are not trying to woo people. How about being open about the spiritual community, the Church? We should approach people honestly and openly, and they will listen. Talk for the sake of talk is no good. We must speak humbly but surely about God, his will, about Jesus Christ and his Forgiveness,” he emphasizes.

INTERNATIONALE MARTIN LUTHER STIFTUNG

As plans begin to emerge to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, the new international Luther Foundation in Wittenberg is announcing initiatives at the historic Reformation site.

See: <http://www.luther-stiftung.org/news.htm>

FAITH IN EUROPE BULLETIN

Keith Jenkins of Faith in Europe informs us that the organization's new Bulletin Board is up and running and ready for your visits. It is hoped to use it to stimulate debate on the future of Europe and issues with a European character. To visit the bulletin board go to <http://faithineurope.org.uk> and click on the bulletin board sign. You can read the content but in order to post comments or initiate discussions you will need to register.

2009 KIRCHENTAG

Preparations for the 2009 German Protestant Kirchentag in Bremen (20th-24th May) are now well in hand. The motto for the event is 'Mensch, wo bist du?' ('Where are you?' NRSV, Genesis 3.9) with an emphasis on the Christian response to current questions facing society. 100 000 participants are expected. Full details are emerging on the website www.kirchentag.net.

NEW EKD REPORT ON CHURCH IN THE CITY

Following on from the Church of England report *Faithful Cities*, the Evangelical Church in Germany has published its own document on Church in the City as *EKD Text 93, Gott in der Stadt*.

The aim is to raise the profile of the Church in urban areas, with a clear response to people's new interest in religion. This will mean new forms of parish, organisational reform, opening up of city churches, a review of the rich music provision in churches, and stronger participation of the Church in local policy making.