



action of churches together in scotland
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Christmas edition 2007

TOGETHER

Beyond Christmas: a message from Scotland's Christian leaders

Leaders and representatives of Scotland's major Christian denominations have issued a joint Christmas message. They say:

Peace be with you!

We're often told that Christmas is stressful for some and lonely for others and too much of a spending frenzy for the majority. It needn't be. Christmas is also a time when we look beyond ourselves and when deep down we want only the best for those closest to us and for all who are in need in our world.

It is a time to hear again the familiar story of the birth of Jesus Christ. A time when we long for peace on earth and goodwill among all people.

But Christmas is more than simply the celebration of the birth of a baby. The story takes us beyond the glitter and the tinsel and the lights to something much deeper.

Most of us experience a sense of awe and wonder when we stand at the foot of a cradle and gaze on a newly born baby. As we see the crib scenes in the centre of our cities, towns and villages, we are moved again by the memory of that experience.

And as we feel it, we are invited to look beyond the baby, to catch a glimpse of God whose gift is hope; the hope of peace and goodwill, of beauty and love.

We are invited to look beyond what we see, however bleak it might seem, to discover signs of goodness and beauty, of hope, of joy wherever people are trying to do their best.

The Christmas story tells us about people trying to do their best in a pretty bleak situation - a couple forced to go to another town for a census, a man doing his best for the woman to whom he was engaged and who was heavily pregnant, but not by him, and an inn keeper trying to do his best for the couple when all the accommodation in town was taken. And, in this very human drama, the birth of a baby.

Then there is the unexpected invitation to the shepherds, an invitation to us all, to go and see in the new-born child the signals of hope for all the earth - to see love and joy and goodness and beauty, the signs of God's presence on earth and the gift of hope for peace and goodwill among all people.

At times it is hard not to feel down-hearted, when our best does not seem good enough:

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when things go wrong with our relationships despite our best intentions; when tragedy hits families or communities both near and far; when so much of our news is about violence, destroying people and our environment.

Christmas is a time for looking beyond these to see goodness and beauty in those around us; to look at tragedy and see the stories of kindness and compassion that carry with them the hope of life beyond the darkness; to look at the violence and see the efforts made to change these patterns and see in them signals of hope for a safer world; to look at our environment and see the beauty that is there and to hear the call for green alternatives as signals of hope for our planet.

When we accept the invitation to look beyond the surface, we become open to signals of hope for ourselves, our families and our world. This is part of God's gift that is celebrated at Christmas but which does not stop there. God invites us to look beyond.

May we all share God's gift of love and hope this Christmas and in the year that lies ahead.

This message was written by: - **The Most Rev Dr Idris Jones**, Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church - **Rt Rev Sheilagh Kesting**, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland- **His Eminence Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien**, Archbishop & Metropolitan of St Andrews and Edinburgh - **Rev Lily Twist**, Chair of the Methodist Synod in Scotland- **Pamala McDougall**, Clerk, General Meeting for Scotland, The Religious Society of Friends- **Major Robert McIntyre**, Scotland Secretariat, The Salvation Army - **Rev David Cartledge**, Moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland- **Rev John Humphreys**, Moderator, United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland- **Brother Stephen Smyth**, General Secretary, Action of Churches Together in Scotland

Appreciating What We Have In Common With Others by Nicholas Hutchinson FSC

Lord, we ask you to open our eyes
that we may value and appreciate
all people,
rather than focussing
on what our differences might be

Inspire us to distinguish between
what is important, and what is not,
and open our minds and hearts
that we may always be people of good will
who bring life and joy to others.

Amen

Scottish Churches' House Appeal.

A £500,000 appeal has been launched to upgrade the existing buildings which form Scottish Churches' House in Dunblane into a modern conference and hospitality centre.

In delivering this appeal the Interim Management Group described the 'House' as 'a unique spiritual, intellectual and social resource for the Scottish churches'.

It has offered a mutual place for 50 years where members of many different denominations and faiths have come together in common interest to work and worship.

The refurbishment will provide the bedrooms with en-suite facilities, update catering provision and transform key conference capacity.

If you would like to hear more about this appeal or about Scottish Churches' House and its 2008 programme please contact:

Danus Skeene, Convener, IMG
07762 166 444

Alastair Hulbert, SCH Warden
01786 822602

Elizabeth Templeton: IMG Member
01796 482232

Bannockburn Churches Working and Sharing Together

Two churches in Bannockburn – The Allan Church of Scotland and Murrayfield United Free Church – have been coming together on a regular basis since the signing of the Covenant of Dunblane between their denominations.

“We came together to promote a better understanding of churches working together and sharing together the Good News among members and out in the community.

On 30th September this year we held the third of our joint services; this took place in the Allan Church. The theme was something that had been discussed about two months prior and the feeling was it was time to begin looking at the community and its people, so it was decided to begin at the top and to hold a service where we could highlight the need to pray for those who worked in the community, beginning with those who serve us politically.

Rather than expecting the ministers to ‘do the service’ but it was decided to do as we have done with the other two services and involve those we would invite.

Rev Graham Blount, the Scottish Churches’ Parliamentary Officer was asked to lead the service and give an insight into his role in the Parliament.

Our Local MSP Bruce Crawford was asked to attend and inform us of his work as a Member of the Scottish Parliament, and Margaret Brisley, our Provost for the Stirling area and local Councillor for Bannockburn, was asked to speak on her role as Provost. Our two other local councillors could not be present that day due to other commitments.

We always try to do something different with the children at these services and John Wilson for Music Ministry came along to teach the children new Worship songs as well as introduce them to Bible based games.

From both Churches the reactions to the service were positive with only four people complaining that politics and religion should not be mixed but it was pointed out to them that politics never got a mention, it was service to the community that was being mentioned and Rev Graham Blount pointed that service to the community is something that Churches are also charged to do.

Overall it was another successful service of worship shared by members of both congregations.

Rev Jim Landels
Bannockburn Allan Church

Churches’ Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland: Annual Meeting & Lecture - Thursday 7 February 2008 from 7pm at Augustine United URC, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh: HG Bishop Agaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church will speak on the topic of ‘Orthodox Spirituality and Inter Faith Relations’ ALL WELCOME

A cuppa can make a world of difference



On Friday 29 February 2008, during Fairtrade Fortnight, **actionaid** are inviting people across the UK to help make a lasting difference to some of the world's poorest people by being part of our annual 24 Hour Tea and Coffee Break – a day devoted to those farmers in developing countries who despite picking the majority of the tea and coffee we drink often face low wages and appalling working conditions.

Last year the support **actionaid** received was invaluable in encouraging thousands of people across the UK to sign up and support their work and they would greatly appreciate your help in distributing leaflets and encouraging people to get involved.

For more information please visit www.coffeebreak.org.uk

Lent 2008 Training for Facilitators of Study Groups Dunblane Cathedral Halls 26 January 2008

ACTS is holding a training day for those who plan to serve as facilitators of Study Groups during Lent 2008.

Rev Peter Colwell from CTBI, who wrote the study material will speak about the purpose and scope of the 'Pathways to Prayer' material.

To participate please call Tom Moyes on 01259 222363 before January 16th 2008

Changes of mailing details please to: Shona Paterson
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Alloa FK10 2HU telephone 01259 222362 or
Email: shonapaterson@acts-scotland.org
Copies of this newsletter can be downloaded from our website www.acts-scotland.org
Please visit our website for more information and news updated regularly.

CTBI enters into Partnership with BBC Radio 4 for Lent

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and BBC Radio 4 are pleased to announce a Lent partnership for 2008 – 'Pathways of Prayer'

Resource materials for individuals and groups will be downloadable from the CTBI and BBC websites www.ctbi.org.uk and www.bbc.co.uk/religion which will offer pointers to enable further exploration of the theme for each week.

Further info from CTBI on 020 7654 7254

To order Your Week of Prayer for Christian Unity material

Material available:

English Pamphlet 65p
Large Print version 65p
A3 posters (2) 65p
Prayer cards (10) £1.00

Handling charge for orders under £10 is £1

.....please contact:

Week of Prayer,
CTBI Publications
4 John Wesley Road
Werrington
Peterborough
PE4 6ZP

Tel: 01733 325002

Reflection material based on 'A Handful of Spiritual Ecumenism' by Cardinal Walter Kasper is to be available to download from the ACTS website soon. www.acts-scotland.org

Materials for 3 sessions, suitable for group or personal reflection at any time of the year has been produced by the Archdiocese of Glasgow Ecumenical Commission in partnership with ACTS. They will be distributed throughout the Archdiocese during Unity Week 2008.

South East Edinburgh Churches Acting Together – Meetings are open to all:

Visit their website at: www.seecat.org
Or phone Secretary, Ruth Davies 0131 664 3608