

The Church of Scotland  
Committee on Ecumenical Relations and  
Action of Churches Together in Scotland

Joint Conference for Presbytery and Presbyterian Council Contacts,  
Council of Churches Groups and Churches Together Groups

Thursday, 27 October 2005  
in St Leonard's-in-the-Fields and Trinity, Perth

Present: See Appendix A

### **1. Dr Alison Elliot**

The Convener of the Church of Scotland's Committee on Ecumenical Relations welcomed everyone to the Conference and introduced Dr Alison Elliot as the keynote speaker.

Alison began with a story of her visit to Gugulethu in South Africa during her year as Moderator. There she attended worship in a congregation which gives support to people with AIDS. There was a presentation of the work they do. Children sang about ABC (Abstain, Be faithful and use a Condom). They finished by singing 'All flesh shall see it together' from Handel's Messiah. Her visits to the townships showed that the churches were generally the only civic buildings among the shacks – apart from Soweto where there were schools and other civic buildings. The ecclesiastical variety in South Africa had been enlarged by the divisions of apartheid. The Uniting Presbyterian Church of South Africa was five years old and was bringing together the Presbyterian Church of South Africa and the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The former had been for white and coloured people. The latter had been mainly Bantu, and therefore black and had been the church with which the Church of Scotland had historic links. The two churches wore different uniforms. There were also fundamental differences. The two churches shared a manual, but they had diverged from it in different ways. The Presbyterian Church had kept it up to date with revisions. The Reformed Presbyterians had kept the traditional form of Assembly with free-flowing discussion. The differences ran deep. On both sides there was suspicion and contempt for the other which had to do with power and authority. Both were open to manipulation by those who know the system.

The RPC had a few powerful mother churches with outstations in a kind of feudal arrangement. The PCSA had a more concentrated Presbyterian structure. They were trying to unite churches that were close to each other and so cut across the RPC arrangement. In addition, there is a huge discrepancy in stipends which was not being addressed. The black congregations were well-attended.

Alison attended worship in Lovedale, one of the most venerable churches from the Scottish missionary period. She had felt very much at home there even though there was dancing in the isles and the service was in Xhosa. She had found a PCSA service in English more alien with its charismatic form and praise bands. As the historical differences grow less there grows an increasingly complex package of personality and social structure. Once cultural differences are given a blessing they become entrenched. There needs to be analysis of the real distinctions, asking which are to do with doctrine and which are social disposition.

When it comes to ecumenism of an inter-church variety there are historical, social and psychological differences to contend with as well as theological.

Alison felt there were two sets of walls to contend with, each related in their origin. One positive legacy of the pioneers is the desire to recognise the civic and community needs of the people. This was seen in schools in India and Bangladesh. The church is seen to be shaping the values of those around them. This is mainly healthy, but not always so. Alison cited work being done with HIV/AIDS people in East London, South Africa. But she had also visited a large church where two girls were brought out to the front. The congregation was informed that the Kirk Session had decided to discipline them and suspend them from church membership for an unspecified period of time. This was followed by others who were being brought back into the fellowship. In carrying out this procedure the Kirk Session understood that they were upholding the Scottish tradition. She was reminded of the cutty stool in Greyfriars in Edinburgh. It had been hard for them to explain to the South Africans how shocked they were.

Alison then invited the conference to discuss barriers to ecumenism. This was followed by a short period of sharing in plenary. Alison then went on to draw out three models of ecumenical relating – Bob the Builder, Jamie Oliver and the Famous Five!

1. Ecumenism as a fixing of institutions in order to be able to use resources better. This is often seen in terms of demolition, a taking down of walls cf. Ephesians 2:14. Walls and buildings enclose. They

represent a cosy way of relating. The Church Without Walls Report in the Church of Scotland had encouraged a thinking beyond the walls. On the other hand, walls can create a sheltering, creative space where hostility can be quietened e.g. Iona Abbey. Space needs boundaries. "Good fences make good neighbours". Is it possible to let go of hostility and keep the wall? Alison felt that with a churches together model of ecumenism it was possible to keep benign walls, though there was a question whether this was good in itself or simply as a staging post. Is it a cop-out or a true vision? It was important to move in the direct of gain rather than loss. This can be captured more in worship than in assemblies. By sharing worship with other traditions you learn what is valuable in your own. She wondered what the URC had gained by their unions? Were they just another denomination?

2. "If we could see the feast we would come." Modelling the feast is what the church is called to do. "Visible unity" can be understood as manipulating the appearance of unity rather than asking what this unity is about. The Lund Principle (not to do anything separately that can be done together) and the El Escorial principles (balancing numbers of men to women, ordained to lay, and an agreed proportion of young people in ecumenical gatherings) provide a valuable discipline. Disciplines are important for stamping the space, but it is not the same as unity. It is a means whereby large churches are held to account by smaller ones. Rowan Williams had said at a conference on unity in St Albans that apart we say, "Don't listen to him, listen to me!" Together we say, "Don't listen to me, but to Christ there as well as here!" This puts the emphasis on 'as you and I are one' (John 17) rather than the previous phrase, 'so that they may be one'. It is about attraction. This is more difficult than constructing a process of unity. It is not about repairing the damage of the past.

3. It is about setting out on an adventure of discovery. There are several strategies for discovery. One is to explore the past, not as an ecumenism of return, but to identify insights that may have been lost. Acting together is another strategy. We will find it difficult but difficulties should be seen as opportunities for better understanding. We can learn from the spirituality of people who do not speak the same language as we do. One weakness with ecumenism is that the focus has been too concentrated on the churches themselves rather than the faith they express.

The spirit of the present, the ghosts of the past and beckoning of the demands of the present – very exciting!

## **2. Group Discussion**

The conference broke into small groups for discussion and sharing stories of ecumenical activity in their local contexts.

## **3. Worship**

Before lunch, there was a time of worship led by Mairi Munro.

## **4. Ecumenical Audit**

The Convener explained that the Ecumenical Relations Committee had put forward the suggestion of an audit of the local ecumenical scene to Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS). The proposal had gone through the Network system of ACTS. It had been agreed to appoint a researcher to carry out the audit. The Convener said he had been part of the appointing committee and was pleased to introduce Mairi Munro who had been the successful candidate.

Mairi then asked people to talk together in two's and three's about a good ecumenical experience. The following comments were made:

- it is wonderful to have shared communion
- one person spoke about her congregation not being allowed to call a replacement for their retiring minister. They took their case to the General Assembly. The Episcopal and Roman Catholic priests in their area prayed for a successful outcome. Permission was granted and the priests attended the minister's induction.
- it is good to have Bible studies where all participate
- one lady spoke of moving from Scotland to Lancashire for 18 years. During that time she made friends with Muslim and Hindu families. On returning to Scotland, these friends kept in touch and she valued the closeness of these personal relationships.
- visible signs of outreach and churches working together in quite down-to-earth and fun ways, such as holding ceilidhs and Psalm Sunday processions.
- someone spoke of a friend being visited in hospital 20 years ago by the local Roman Catholic priest who had prayed for him. This was unusual at that time and had crossed religious barriers.

Mairi explained the aims of the audit:

1. To discover and reflect upon the nature of ecumenical engagement in three areas in Scotland (Paisley, St Andrews and Inverness).

2. To identify current insights, opportunities and needs on the ecumenical journey.

She said that the audit was overseen by a reflection group and the full findings will be made available at the end of November to ACTS, the National Sponsoring Body and the church members of the areas audited.

Data had been collected by means of a questionnaire distributed to churches within the local Churches Together groups, affiliated organisations and key individuals. Personal interviews were carried out and two workshop events were held in each area. Local Churches Together groups had welcomed the audit and were keen to hear the findings. A summary of the questionnaire findings is attached at Appendix B.

Mairi said that there are distinctive characteristics of all three areas and shared patterns and issues such as evangelism and services of worship. Mairi found that in Paisley, international awareness raising and campaigning came out higher than in the other areas. She felt this was because Paisley is a Fair Trade town. Across the three areas 150 questionnaires had been returned.

Maire asked people to consider, in small groups, what they considered was important to building up good local ecumenical relations. Feedback received:

- how clergy get on matters
- ecumenical worship in schools
- doors open to everyone

Mairi said that in Inverness there is a Hogmanay service and fireworks display. This draws in people who would not normally go to church.

The Convener commented that at the local level people want to commit to each other in different ways. He asked Mairi if she had found that local initiatives had come from the clergy. Mairi said that in some cases the initiative does not come from Churches Together groups but from people who come together because of a social need, ie homeless or elderly people needing care by offering lunches in church halls.

Mairi said that many ecumenical activities are cyclical and come to an end when people move. It is difficult for people not to see them as a failure. She said that attitudes towards joint working by local church leaders are key. Time poverty inhibits ecumenical engagement. Churches have difficulty "keeping their own ship afloat" and ecumenism gets the crumbs from the table.

The Convener thanked Mairi for coming along and sharing the findings of her research.

## **5. Newsdesk 2005**

Rev Lindsey Sanderson, Assistant General Secretary of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and Rev Sheilagh Kesting, Secretary of the Ecumenical Relations Committee, read the news for 2005. (See appendix C).

## **6. Closing Worship**

The Convener thanked Lindsey and Sheilagh for their contributions to the conference. He also thanked the church officer for all his help and Ros Milne for organisational arrangements.

He then brought the conference to a close with worship.

## Appendix A

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Thursday, 27 October 2005  
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### PRESENT:

#### From the Presbyteries, Councils and Churches Together Groups:

Mr James Alexander (Inverness), Mr Ian Ansdell (Glasgow Churches Together), Rev Keith Blackwood (Dumbarton), Mrs Margaret Bonthron (Stirling), Rev Robert Boyle (Dunfermline), Mrs May Collins (Partick Local Churches), Mrs Lorna Coulter (Falkirk), Mrs Jean Cowan (Falkirk), Mrs Barbara Dalling (Partick Local Churches), Mrs Ruth Davies (SE Edinburgh Churches Acting Together), Mrs Elizabeth Ferguson (West Lothian), Father Gerry Fitzpatrick (Glasgow Churches Together), Rev Suzie Fletcher (Stirling), Mrs Eleanor Gault (Ayr), Dr Allan Gordon (Melrose and Peebles), Mr Charles Gore (Inter Church Relations Committee, Scottish Episcopal Church), Rev Alasdair Graham (Angus), Mrs Margaret Graham (Glasgow North), Rev Catherine Hepburn (Kincardine and Deeside), Rev Norman Hutcheson (Dumfries and Kirkcudbright), (Rev Alan Lamb (Lochaber), Mrs Helen Lamb (Lochaber), Mr Stephen Lambert (Dollar and District Churches), Mrs Sylvia Livingston (Dumfries & Kirkcudbright), Mrs Gabrielle McCracken (Kilmarnock), Mrs Charlotte McCrone (Irvine and Kilmarnock), Mr Roy MacGregor (St Andrews Churches Together), Mr Ian Mackinnon (Perth Action of Churches Together), Mrs Jean MacMillan (Annandale and Eskdale), Mrs Ethel Marsh (Dunfermline), Mrs Jean Morton (Lanark), Mrs Wilma Munro (Edinburgh), Rev Winnie Munson (Shetland), Mr Harry Parker (Dunfermline), Mrs Caroline Penman (Ross Tain), Dr William Reid (Ecumenical Officer, Methodist Church), Mrs Linda Rice (Seeds of Hope, Perth), Mrs Rosemary Richards (Moray West), Mrs Constance Robertson (Kirkcaldy), Mr Lewis Rose (Aberdeen), Mrs Elizabeth Slack (St Andrews Churches Together), Mrs Carine Smith (Kirkcaldy), Mrs Mary Smith (Caithness), Brother Stephen Smyth (Glasgow Churches Together), Mrs Alison Thomson (Glasgow North West), Mr John Thomson (ACTS Mission Network), Mrs Margaret Walker (Hamilton South), Mrs Mabel Wallace (Lochaber), Mrs Sheila Watkins (Dunkeld and Meigle), Mrs Anne Watt (Angus West)

From the Committee: Rev Bill Brown (Convener), Dr Alison Elliot OBE, Rev Alexander Horsburgh, Rev Sheilagh Kesting (Secretary), Mrs Vivienne Macdonald, Miss Ros Milne (Administrative Officer), Rev Valerie Ott (Vice Convener), Rev Bruce Thomson

From Action of Churches Together in Scotland: Miss Mairi Munro (Researcher), Rev Lindsey Sanderson (Assistant General Secretary)

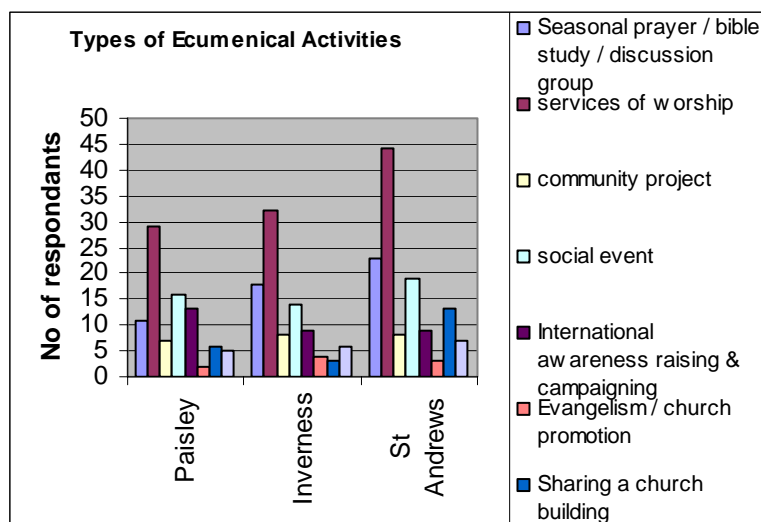
## Appendix B

### **ACTS Ecumenical audit – Summary of questionnaire findings**

#### **Aims:**

- To discover and reflect upon the nature of ecumenical engagement in 3 areas in Scotland
- To identify current insights, opportunities and needs on the ecumenical journey

#### **What are people doing ecumenically?**



### **What is important for building up good local ecumenical relations?**

- ❖ Socialising with other churches (83%)
- ❖ Shared bible study & discussion about faith (79%)
- ❖ Agreeing on issues of doctrine (34%)
- ❖ Addressing needs of local community together (90%)
- ❖ Worshipping with other churches (80%)
- ❖ Having a formal agreement (19%)

### **What do people want to develop at a local level?**

- Desire to worship ecumenically \*\*
- Children / youth focus\*\*
- Social occasions to build relationships\*\*
- Concern for global action & campaigning
- Engaging with and working in the local community\*\*
- Work to increase participation at existing events\*\*
- Shared discussion about faith
- Big gatherings
- ecumenical outreach
- Working on environmental issues
- Increase communication / information\*\*
- nurturing social wellbeing
- Interfaith work
- Specific ideas in each local place

### **What resources / support would be helpful from a national level / body?**

- Sharing information / stories / good practice from different areas
- Providing materials / information sheets to raise awareness workshops, better study / worship material
- Developing & inspiring local leadership
- Help in renewing / creating / encouraging genuine grassroots activity & structures to respond to local issues
- People visiting & enabling in local areas – local ecumenical officers / ACTS personnel - to encourage / inform / inspire / facilitate.

### **Emerging issues**

- Are the structures of ecumenism tired and jaded - locally and nationally? How can our energies be best directed?
- What are our expectations of ecumenical working? What paradigms or models are we working out of?
- How can positive attitudes to collaborative and ecumenical working be engendered / encouraged among clergy and the laity whom they influence?
- How can the question of time allocation and priorities be aired, without overburdening already struggling ministers and communities?
- Important ecumenical experiences have frequently centred around shared worship and responding to local community needs. Building relationships have been key. How does this inform the church's understanding and practice?

## **Appendix C**

### **Newsdesk Items**

#### **ACTS launches new website and publications**

In June, the rebuilt ACTS website was launched, offering surfers news and information about ecumenical happenings in Scotland and throughout the wider world. 'We see the development of the website as a key tool in our communication strategy with member churches, local churches together groups and the interested public' said Kevin Franz, General Secretary of ACTS. The site features news from Scotland, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the World Council of Churches. There is a section for events and publications as well as background information about the many ecumenical groups associated with ACTS. Two sections are being developed as resource banks – Faith in Politics and the Scottish Churches National Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships – each will provide free downloadable material for their subject area. A further development is that from now on the Advent and Lent reflections produced by ACTS will be free to download from the website. If you still wish hard copies these are available from the ACTS office. You can visit the website at [www.acts-scotland.org](http://www.acts-scotland.org)

#### **Joint Commission on Doctrine meets in Rome**

The Church of Scotland-Roman Catholic Church Joint Commission on Doctrine held its last meeting in Rome. They stayed at the Scots College where Rev Dr Philip Tartaglia, a former member of the Joint Commission and now bishop designate of Paisley, is the Rector. The Joint Commission met representatives of the Pontifical Council for the Promoting of Christian Unity who warmly commended the draft report presented by the Joint Commission and encouraged the Commission in its continuing work. Later the Scottish group was introduced to Archbishop Levada, the Prefect of the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith, and members of his staff. They also attended the general audience with the Pope. With the encouragement of the senior staff at the Vatican, the Joint Commission hopes to commend joint liturgies for baptism and the renewal of baptismal vows.

#### **CAIRS appoints an Education Worker**

CAIRS, the Churches Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland has appointed Andrew Sarle as its Education Worker. The appointment is part time and for a three year period. Andrew is a member of the Church of Scotland and former teacher whose remit is to raise awareness regarding the promotion of dialogue between members of the Christian Churches and members of other faith communities. Andrew began work at the end of September. This post has become possible through funding given principally by the Scottish Episcopal Church and a number of Roman Catholic religious orders. Andrew can be contacted through the ACTS office or at [andrew.cairs@acts-scotland.org](mailto:andrew.cairs@acts-scotland.org)

#### **Scottish Churches House Appeal**

During the course of this year the full scale of the financial crisis faced by Scottish Churches House has become apparent and in June the Scottish Churches Forum launched an appeal for the House. The purpose of the Appeal was to raise sufficient funds to allow the House to continue operating while a secure financial future for the House was established. The appeal target was £120,000 and thanks to the generosity of many people that target was reached. The new House Management Group, the Wardens and trustees are now working to establish a secure financial basis for the House so that this ecumenical witness in Scotland may continue.

#### **Centenary of the French Protestant Federation**

The French Protestant Federation celebrated its centenary in October. The Federation was founded in 1905 when France officially became a secular country, separating religion and politics. This put the Protestant churches on an equal footing with the Roman Catholic Church in their relation to the state. Because the protestant churches are so small, they grouped themselves into a Federation so that their voice could be more clearly heard. The Federation includes, Reformed Churches, the Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church, Baptist churches and the Salvation Army. Guests from other churches, including the Church of Scotland and United Reformed Church, attend the celebrations which included a discussion on church-state relation, the place of Reformed churches in Europe and their participation in inter-religious dialogue, particularly with Muslims and Jews. The Protestant Federation engages with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches in the French Ecumenical Council.

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#### **ACTS works to develop its churches together strategy**

Building on the work begun with the Local Ecumenical Audit, ACTS is seeking to develop a strategy for working with locally based churches together groups. Speaking about the strategy, Lindsey Sanderson, who acts as a contact point with these groups said, 'We have 126 registered churches together groups across Scotland but we have very little contact with many of them. We would like to develop a three fold strategy based around mailings, ACTS events and participation at churches together group event. In addition to the ACTS newsletter which is sent to groups four times a year we would like to introduce two dedicated churches together mailings to highlight events and activities. In addition to the autumn conference we would like to consider a summer celebration event to be held

on a Saturday or Sunday and we would like to be able to respond to more invitations for ACTS staff or representatives to participate in Churches Together event, particularly on occasions such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.' The first stage in developing the strategy was the creation of the ACTS information pack which was sent to all Churches Together Groups over the summer, and invited people to sign up for hard copy or e-mail updates.

### **World Council of Churches 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly**

Delegates and other participants from the Scottish Churches are preparing themselves for the World Council of Churches' 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly which will be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006. This is the first time the Assembly has been held in Brazil. It will be held in the campus of the Roman Catholic University – the first time the Roman Catholic Church, which is not a member of the WCC, has been among the host churches. As in Britain, the Roman Catholic Church is full member of the National Christian Council of Brazilian. The theme for the Assembly is a prayer: God, in your grace, transform the world. Churches in Colinton, Juniper Green, Currie and Balerno on the outskirts of Edinburgh, are holding a series of meetings leading up to Advent to learn more about the issues that will be discussed by the Assembly. The theme is to be explored from several angles:

- ✓ God, in your grace, transform **our world**
- ✓ God, in your grace, transform **the earth**
- ✓ God, in your grace, transform **our societies**
- ✓ God, in your grace, transform **our churches**
- ✓ God, in your grace, transform **our lives**
- ✓ God, in your grace, transform **our witness**

Related material, bible studies and worship material can be down-loaded from the WCC website for local use and the names of delegates can be obtained from the church offices of the Church of Scotland Offices of the Church of Scotland, the United Free Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church. <http://www.wcc-assembly.info/>. There is a logo which can also be down loaded for local use.

### **ACTS Office is moving to Alloa**

In recent months the ACTS Secretariat has been considering the question of how it best fulfils its mandate from the member churches. During the course of these considerations it has become clear that there is much general confusion about what ACTS does and that people often associate ACTS with its location in Scottish Churches House. In order to make the work of the ecumenical instrument more visible and to allow the new management group of Scottish Churches House to have full freedom in determining what happens with the Scottish Churches House site the Scottish Churches Forum has decided that the ACTS Secretariat will relocate to Inglewood House in Alloa. Inglewood House is the former home of the Forrester Paton family and is presently part of a business centre run by Clackmannanshire Enterprise. This does not mean the end of ACTS relationship with Scottish Churches House as it is anticipated that many ACTS meetings and events will still be hosted by Scottish Churches House.

### **First for Local Ecumenical Partnerships in Scotland**

Saturday 26 November sees the first event of its kind in Scotland – a Gathering for people involved in Local Ecumenical Partnerships in Scotland. The event, entitled, 'Celebrate Together,' is being held in the Lanthorn Centre, Livingston and is part of the programme of the Scottish Churches National Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The event will feature a keynote address by Revd. Dr. Mary Cotes, Ecumenical Moderator of Milton Keynes Christian Council and there will also be the opportunity to participate in workshops on the themes of Being Churches Together, Worshipping Together, Learning Together and Acting Together. There will be displays from LEPs across Scotland, discussion groups, worship and a ceilidh. Already 70 people have booked in for this event but there is room for more! Booking forms are available today and the costs of the whole event (meals included) is £20. See you there!

### **Scottish Ecumenical Gathering – Seeds of Hope**

We hope you will want to get involved with Seeds of Hope and there are a number of ways you can do that.

Firstly, come along. We are aiming for at least a thousand people, so tell your congregation, churches together groups and friends about the event, book a bus and head to Perth on the 17 June. There will be a free bus service running between Perth's park and ride car parks, bus and train stations to getting to the Centre will be straightforward.

Secondly if you feel you have a story to share of Seeds of hope in your church or community come and share it at the market place or through a workshop. Take a stall for the day and tell others about a church based community project, an ecumenical initiative - whatever excites you and gives you hope today.

Thirdly, if you live more locally you might want to help out as a steward or work with children and young people on the day. We are looking for teams of people from local churches to do this and we're working closely with Perth Action of Churches Together in this area.

Finally – spread the word. There are copies of the latest information sheet for everyone and we have publicity cards for distribution and there are pages on the web. We need your involvement if it is to be the inspirational day that the planning group are working towards.

If you want any further information about the Gathering then contact Lindsey Sanderson at the ACTS Office.

And finally.....local tourism chiefs have become concerned about an addition to the City of Perth's tourism strapline. Instead of reading Perth, the perfect centre, it now reads Perth, the ecumenical centre. When questioned about this a source within Action of Churches Together in Scotland replied that it seemed most fitting with the number of significant ecumenical events taking place in the city over the next nine months. However the source denied all knowledge of any rumours that Perth was so ecumenical the World Council of Churches was moving there from Geneva.

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