GETI ‘17 is an ecumenical theological initiative for education and encounter for advanced theology students from all over the world who are studying in Europe. It will take place in Berlin, 19 May - 1 June 2017. The opportunity for encounter and joint studies will aim to contribute to a European network of contacts and strengthen the mutual perception of European and migrant churches. Participants shall study and experience horizons of ecumenical theology and ecclesiology. The approach of GETI ‘17 can be summarised under three headings: Reforming Theology - Migrating Church - Transforming Society. Full details are available online at: www.geti-17.de

About ACTS

Founded in 1990, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) is a joint initiative of the Church of Scotland, Congregational Federation, Methodist Church, Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church, Salvation Army, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Free Church of Scotland and United Reformed Church. ACTS aims to bring Christians of different traditions in Scotland closer to one another in their shared faith in Jesus Christ by meeting, praying, learning, reflecting and acting together on matters of common concern.

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Action of Churches Together in Scotland is registered in Scotland (at the above address) as a Charity (no. SC000295) and as a Company limited by guarantee (no. SC348236)

From the General Secretary

Welcome to the latest edition of the “Together” newsletter.

In April, ACTS organised a visit to Brussels for church leaders and senior representatives. This was an invaluable opportunity to learn more about the work of the European Union, particularly given the UK’s membership referendum on 23rd June. A report from the ACTS Convener is contained within this edition.

ACTS Programme Groups continue to be busy. More information on coming events will be available soon; please check the ACTS website regularly for information.

Looking ahead, please note some of the forthcoming events – such as the Scottish Churches tent at the Royal Highland Show (23-26 June), the CTBI conference on visible unity (22-23 November) and the annual joint ACTS/Church of Scotland day conference, which will be at Nicolson Square Methodist Church, Edinburgh, on Saturday 8th October. More information will follow.

The work towards a new strategic plan for ACTS is ongoing. I had hoped that it would be complete by now, but is taking more time. The importance of getting such a document right (rather than rushed) is paramount.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Very Reverend Dr Sheilagh Kesting, Ecumenical Officer of the Church of Scotland since 1993, a long and happy retirement. Sheilagh will retire this autumn and will be greatly missed; I thank her for all her work in furthering ecumenical relations.

Prayerful good wishes,

Matthew Ross
ACTS General Secretary

Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)
Historic ecumenical agreement between the Church of Scotland and Church of England

This account is based on news reports from the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

In May 2016, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland unanimously backed a landmark agreement to enter into an historic ecumenical partnership with the Church of England.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, made history when he took part in a debate on the issue at the General Assembly Hall on the Mound in Edinburgh.

Under the terms of the agreement, both denominations would welcome one another’s members into congregations and ordained ministers would be allowed to exercise ministry within the existing discipline of each church, though only within England and continental Europe.

Speaking after the vote, the Rev Alison McDonald, Convener of the Church of Scotland’s Ecumenical Relations Committee, said: "I am delighted that the General Assembly has accepted the report and the Columba Declaration this morning. It is the end of what has been a very long process up to now, but it is the beginning of looking forward to new work and powerful dialogue on the need for churches to act and speak out on behalf of migrants and refugees in Europe."

"Our denomination has built up partnerships not only within the Reformed Church family but across denominations. So while within Scotland our Anglican neighbour is the Scottish Episcopal Church, in England, and mainland Europe, places where the Church of Scotland has congregations, it is the Church of England," she added.

English-speaking clergy in England and across denominations will be able to perform baptisms, confirmations and marriages while in the region, and both denominations will welcome one another’s members within the UK but not only in the UK but also in Ireland and beyond.

Religious freedom and trends in religion in Portugal were also featured on the agenda. CEC Study Secretary Peter Pavlovic led the group in a discussion of EU economic governance and introduced the work of the Multi-Faith Euroaction Network in Portugal.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said: "I am absolutely delighted with the result and hugely grateful for the support of the General Assembly."

He added that the most significant part of the Columba Declaration was both denominations formally recognising each other as Churches.

"It is a huge step and once you have done that there is a massive impulse to develop it into a deeper and deeper relationship, not only in the UK but internationally with Presbyterian churches," he added.

Ms McDonald said the Kirk had built up partnerships not only within the Reformed Church family but across denominations. "So while within Scotland our Anglican neighbour is the Scottish Episcopal Church, in England, and mainland Europe, places where the Church of Scotland has congregations, it is the Church of England," she added.

"Think, Pray, Vote Resources for churches regarding the EU membership referendum on 23rd June 2016 from the Joint Public Issues Team are available online: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk"

"Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees – conference"

Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees will hold a conference at St Andrew’s and St George’s West Church, George Street, Edinburgh on 21st June. For more information please visit the website: www.sfar.org.uk

ACTS is pleased to support the Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees and has awarded a grant of £12,000 from the Scottish Churches House Legacy Reserve to help with their work.

"Visit the ACTS website www.scots-acts.org.uk"
UK than those booking from France.

Finally the group spent a couple of hours at the offices of the Conference of European Churches at the heart of the political centre of Brussels. Here we heard of how CEC is continually working to influence the EU on matters such as human rights, migration, human trafficking, Roma people, and sustainable development goals.

The General Secretary of ACTS Rev Matthew Ross summed up: “This has been a very worthwhile trip. We have been briefed by experts from the European Commission on the major issues facing Europe. This will help to ensure that the churches are properly informed about the issues before the forthcoming referendum.”

Meeting of General Secretaries from across Europe

The General Secretaries of national ecumenical organisations from across Europe met in Lisbon, 30 May – 3 June. This annual meeting, facilitated by the Conference of European Churches, is an important opportunity for the General Secretaries to meet and discuss issues. The meeting was held at St Paul’s Cathedral, Lisbon – the Cathedral of the Lusitanian Church (the Anglican Church in Portugal) at the invitation of the Portuguese Council of Christian Churches (COPIC).

Presentations relating to the ongoing refugee crisis were given by the Rev Alfredo Abad Heras (Spain), Vice-Moderator of the Executive Committee of Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe, and Cardinal Manuel Clemente, Patriarch of Lisbon. Cardinal Clemente took a special interest in the group and offered a personal guided tour of the historical treasures of the Monastery of São Vicente de Fora. He engaged the group in an

Royal Highland Show

Please come and visit the Churches in Rural Scotland tent at the Royal Highland Show, Ingliston, 23rd - 26th June 2016
The conference will aim to explore current understandings of what is meant by “visible unity”. Hearing from those involved in local contexts, new developments in inter-Christian co-operation, as well as recent ecumenical agreements.

The conference will be organised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and will take place in the Holiday Inn Edinburgh City West, 107 Queensferry Road, Edinburgh. See the CTBI website: www.ctbi.org.uk

Local ecumenical groups

Please do share your news

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The joint ACTS / Church of Scotland ecumenical conference will be on Saturday 8th October at Nicolson Square Methodist Church, Edinburgh. Details to follow on the ACTS website.

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By the Rev John Butterfield

Called to be One: CTBI conference, Edinburgh, 8 October 2016

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