October edition 2010

Scotland’s Ecumenical Visitors Welcomed

Pope Benedict XVI in Scotland
A Personal and Ecumenical Perspective from Brother Stephen Smyth, ACTS General Secretary

From 14-17 September, the World Council of Churches Executive Committee met in Carberry Towers, just outside Edinburgh. The WCC had decided to hold one of their meetings in Scotland to mark the significance of the Edinburgh 1910 and 2010 conferences and the contribution Scotland has made to the worldwide ecumenical journey. The 25 committee members of the Executive Committee attended the meeting.

The state visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom began with his arrival in Scotland on 16 September. As the first ever state visit by a Pope to our shores, it was a truly historic occasion. In my role as General Secretary of ACTS I had the privilege of participating in three major events during the visit.

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First, I had the honour of attending the official state welcome and reception for the Pope held by the Queen at Holyrood Palace. This event was both very formal and remarkably relaxed. There were significant speeches by both heads of state, massed pipe bands and 400 civic and religious leaders from across the United Kingdom. The reception took place in a vast marquee in the palace grounds.

The same afternoon, I participated at the Papal Mass in Bellahouston Park in Glasgow, there I had the privilege of being one of thirty people chosen to receive communion from Pope Benedict himself. 70,000 people attended the Mass and 400 priests concelebrated. A special moment was when the vast crowd paused for almost five minutes silence before the beginning of the Mass. The music included both traditional Celtic and contemporary Scottish styles. The weather all day was beautiful – a minor miracle for mid-September in Scotland!

The following evening I was in London along with nine colleagues from ACTS representing eight church denominations. We went to attend the national ecumenical service in Westminster Abbey. The service was in the Anglican evensong tradition and was led by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The entry procession was formal and colourful; the choral and congregational singing were glorious.

The invitations I received, from the Royal Palace and the Scottish Bishops, were a recognition of the importance of ecumenical engagement in Scotland and the particular role that ACTS plays in this engagement.

The invitation to Westminster Abbey indicates the healthy state of ecumenical engagement across the nations of the United Kingdom.

In Glasgow, Pope Benedict spoke about the Catholic Church’s irrevocable commitment to ecumenism. He also referred to this year being the 450th anniversary of the Reformation Parliament in Scotland. In the same sermon, he reminded us of Pope John Paul II’s exhortation to Scotland’s churches to ‘walk hand in hand’ together; and commended our churches for the ecumenical progress they have made, even since John Paul’s visit (1982).

ACTS member churches presence at Holyrood, Bellahouston and Westminster is a clear witness to the good relationships among Scotland’s churches and to many years of determined work to heal our difficult religious history. A number of our Interfaith colleagues were also present at these events. Many Catholics were encouraged to feel the support and respect from other traditions when celebrating these significant events.

Before the Pope’s visit there was a lot of very negative commentary in the media. In the event, it would be hard to see how the advance negativity related to the joyful, prayerful and thought—provoking series of formal occasions, services and sermons that we actually experienced.

The personality of the Pope came across as much warmer and appealing than that which the media had prepare us for. His manner was clearly that of a caring pastor and teacher. His words ....

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covered a lot of themes and were carefully measured. The atmosphere in the crowds, both with the smaller more intimate events and with the vast crowds was welcoming and attentive.

Most of what Pope Benedict had to say was addressed to the Catholic community, encouraging people in their faith, speaking to the clergy, the faithful and especially to young people. At the same time, much of what he said was of interest to many more people, particularly when talking about society, culture and the common good; or about atheism, secularism and the role of faith and reason in society.

Many people, of all faiths and none, would find his challenges to elements of our society helpful rather than condemnatory. Most people I have spoken to were deeply impressed by what they have seen. Thinking back, I wonder how much, I personally was negatively affected by the media campaign. There might be a lesson there for me to consider.

All in all, the one day that Pope Benedict spent in Scotland, and the three days in England, were a huge blessing and success – not just for the Catholic community. I am proud to have been involved – along with many of my ecumenical friends and colleagues.

WCC ecumenical visit continued from cover page.....

Members and 10 staff came from all over the world and represented a wide spectrum of church traditions. ACTS helped host the WCC meeting, but were not present for their business sessions.

Of particular interest to the WCC was the ‘churches together’ model of ecumenism as operated by ACTS today. Central to this is the respect and good relations we have built up among our member churches and beyond. Such relationships take time and commitment to develop and require a high degree of trust among the partners. Clearly, it is much easier for ACTS to operate this model with a membership of just nine, rather than the WCC with about 360 members.

In the two days before the WCC’s business meeting, ACTS provided several enculturation experiences for about 15 of the WCC party. On the Sunday morning, they attended services with local congregations of various denominations. The evening they participated in the national Racial Justice Sunday service and the launch of MECTIS (Minority Ethnic Christians Together in Scotland), organised by ACTS in Wellington Church of Scotland, Glasgow. Several WCC people, who cam from black American churches, were very impressed with the sensitive way in which ACTS and the new churches had worked together in developing MECTIS **

On the Monday the WCC group visited Scottish Churches House. 50 years ago, shortly after the House was founded, the WCC had visited and held a service of dedication of the House and its work. There ACTS provided a workshop on our experiences of the churches together model.

**MECTIS is a network that brings together about 50 of the African led, or ex-patriot, or Pentecostal churches and fellowships which have begun to appear in Scotland. MECTIS is an independent organisation which ACTS, especially through our previous and current Racial Justice Officers has helped set up. Working in partnership with MECTIS, we hope to increase knowledge and cooperation between these new expressions of church and the more traditional or established churches in the country.
Then, on the Tuesday evening, at the end of their first full day of business, ACTS hosted a Conversation on the churches together model. This brought together Christine Davis of the Religious Society of Friends; Very Rev Sheilagh Kesting, Ecumenical Officer and former Moderator of the Church of Scotland; and Most Rev Mario Conti, RC Archbishop of Glasgow. The session was facilitated by the Rev Norman Shanks, former Leader of the Iona Community. Each of our three conversationalists has long and committed experience of ecumenical engagement, In a conversational format they shared many stories of the joys and frustrations of our ecumenical journey.

Our WCC visitors were struck by the depth and warmth of the relationships among the panel and the principled commitment of our churches. They heard painful disagreements and disappointments being aired, and differences being respected; they heard they joy of achievements, of milestones and minor miracles. There was a lot of laughter. At the end of the conversation, we presented each of our visitors with one of the small St John’s crosses as a memento of their visit.

This session was followed by a formal dinner for which we were joined by a number of Scottish church leaders and a few representatives from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Cytun (which is Churches Together in Wales), and the Irish Council of Churches.

We have received some very positive feedback from our WCC colleagues regarding the warmth of the welcome and hospitality they received, the quality of the preparation and planning and the stimulus of our ideas and experience. This affirmative feedback was gratefully received on behalf of all our member churches.

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### Working with Children in the Church

The Working with Children in the Church Community Core Group is following up on its very successful and oversubscribed Conference of November 2009 by organising two Conferences in November of this year.

At the first Conference, in Inverness on November 6th, the keynote speaker will be Andy Bathgate, Chief Executive of Scripture Union Scotland, and at the second, in Edinburgh on November 27th, the speaker will be Ian White, Programme Leader for courses in Children’s and Youth Ministry in Cliff College, Derbyshire. Each will address the topic of how the faith of children of primary school age can be nurtured in church communities.

As well as the speeches the Conferences will feature workshops on music that engages children and their families; resources for teaching; “Messy Church”; holiday clubs – and afterwards; engaging children in worship; Toddler Church and Baby Song; and “Godly Play”. Full details can be found on the ACTS’ web site (www.acts-scotland.org).”

There will also be an opportunity for those attending to share their experiences and exchange ideas about how children can be encouraged to play their full part in the life of the churches. The Conference fee is £10 which covers lunch and coffee. The closing date for applications for places is October 26th. Please send to Tom Moyes at the ACTS office - address on the cover page of this newsletter.
Advent 2010
Learning from Each Other

ACTS Advent resource has this year been prepared by Andrew Sarle of IRENIC – (Inter Religious Encounter Information Consultancy). The writer explains how and what people of other faiths are celebrating during the period of Advent, and is an interesting and informative read. Copies may be downloaded free from ACTS website at www.acts-scotland.org or, for a small cover charge copies may bought from ACTS (address on cover page). You can be in touch with IRENIC by emailing Andrew at interfaith@irenic.org.uk

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2011
All things in Common

The Week of Prayer of Christian Unity is celebrated each year from 18-25 January. This year an ecumenical group in Jerusalem were the originators of the material. Amidst all the chaos and danger of the Middle East, the churches in Jerusalem challenge the whole Church to remain faithful to the vocation to be one, and to recommit ourselves to pray for the unity of the church. Downloadable versions of the material and web orders may be accessed from www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer. Further copies available from Norwich Books and Music, 13a Hellesdon Park Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR6 5DR Order line 01603 785925 or orders@norwichbooksandmusic.co.uk

Revd Andrew Scobie
9 July 1935 – 11 October 2010

In sadness I have to tell you about the passing of Revd Andrew Scobie, after a long illness, very bravely borne. Andrew featured on the cover page of our last newsletter as he celebrated 45 years in his parish at Cardross – a special and happy occasion for all who attended. Although very ill at this time Andrew vowed to serve his parish ‘for as long as he had the strength to continue’. A promise he kept to the end.

Andrew was one of the team of writers who produced the Week of Prayer material for many years, and was a valued member of ACTS Church Life Network. A gifted writer, Andrew’s hymn ‘Look forward in Faith’ was sung when ACTS welcomed the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches to Scottish Churches House, just a few weeks ago.

Andrew loved people, he was keen to know the person, not the label and was always interested to hear other people’s points of view and why they had formed that view - he was always open to ideas. He was a wonderful colleague, friend and mentor.

He will be very much missed by everyone in ACTS, and to the wider community in Cardross where he was greatly respected by members of all the churches as well as those who had no church connection, but were part of the everyday life of Andrew’s parish.

Please remember his wife Jeannette and family in your prayers.

Shona Paterson
The Craighead Institute

The Craighead Institute is a Glasgow based ecumenical Institute of Life and Faith, involved in Training, Research and Consultancy in a local and international context. They have a long association with the main Christian denominations in Scotland.

The staff and associates work systemically with specific emphasis on work which engages faith, values and beliefs in society. They seek to help groups and individuals find ways to make a difference, with a focus on a faith which does justice.

For more information about their courses, please contact Esther McClure, The Craighead Institute, 26 Rose Street, Glasgow G3 6RE Email: craiginst@aol.com

Day of Ecumenical Reflection
The annual Day of Ecumenical Reflection, organised and hosted by the Archdiocesan Ecumenical Commission, takes place on Saturday, November 13th. This year, the 450th Anniversary of the Scottish Reformation, the theme of the day will focus on The Life and Theology of Jean Calvin. The day will be led by Fr. Harry O'Brien, from the Motherwell Diocese and the Rev. Dr. Derek Browning, Parish Minister at Morningside Parish Church.

The event will be held this year at St. Catharines Convent, 4 Lauriston Gardens in Edinburgh. The format will follow that of previous years. It is intended to start with lunch at 12.00 noon. Intending participants are asked to bring a packed lunch. Soup, tea and coffee will be served at St. Catharines. The first session will then begin at 1.00pm. The day will end with a Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving at 4.30pm. There is a suggested donation of £6.

Don’t miss this ………….:

• 20 November: 10am – 4pm, City Chambers, Edinburgh. SRT@40 Helping the church engage with ethical issues in science is a conference marking 40 years of the Society, Religion and Technology Project. £10 (includes lunch and refreshments) Further information and booking from Murdo Macdonald on 0131 225 5722 or churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk

• Losing Faith: There will always be people who lose faith, but how do we reconnect with those who have walked away? With his new book, Andy Frost sensitively explores the tricky issues associated with those who have walked away from the church or have struggles with their faith and offers practical and compassionate advice on how we can help them. Cost £8 – to order call 020 8944 5678 (Mon-Fri 10am-5pm)
Steven Mackie

Members and staff of ACTS and Scottish Churches House were sad to hear of the recent death of Steven Mackie.

Steven was a former member of the World Council of Churches and wrote a popular book on ministry. Steven was the son of Robert Mackie, who was instrumental in the decision to create the little row of cottages sitting beside Dunblane Cathedral into Scotland's ecumenical centre, we all know as Scottish Churches House. Steven continued to show interest and support in Scottish Churches House over the years and will be missed by all.

Other Events at Scottish Churches House:

Meeting Points Programme:
‘Set the Prisoners Free’: 4 November 2010 10.30am-4.00pm Cost £20

Grasping Nettles Programme:
‘A Multi-Faith Scotland – An Issue for Inter-Faith Week’: 1 December 2010 Cost £15
6.30pm – 9.00pm - Cost includes light evening meal

Residential Advent Retreat:
Advent Gospels: 3 December 2010 from 10.00pm to 5 December 2010 4.00pm
With Kathy Galloway
Booking details above

A Quiet Day for Scotland

Don't forget to mark a Quiet Day for Scotland – the weekend nearest to Saint Andrew's Day (30 November). Take a moment out of a very busy time in the run up to Christmas in quiet reflection. Check your local area for events or visit the ACTS website www.acts-scotland.org Resources prepared to help you host an event can be found under Networks – Church Life.
Faiths in Scotland Community Action Fund (FiSCAF)

Faiths in Scotland Community Action Fund (FiSCAF) provides grants and support for local faith groups taking action in the struggle against poverty in Scotland’s most fragile and disadvantaged areas. Faith and people matter and the vision of FiSCAF is to support people who, motivated by faith, wish to do something practical to tackle poverty and inequality in their community. We want our help to enable faith groups to be more effective in supporting local people to make transitions in their lives, to have increased self-esteem, confidence and skills and so be better equipped to improve community life.

From youth drop-in centres to young Mums support groups, IT classes for Muslim women to befriending schemes, we already support many groups whose faith has inspired them to take action in their local areas and whose work has had a hugely positive impact. Here are a couple of examples:

- Hyzone is a FiSCAF supported project which provides a wide range of engaging activities for vulnerable young people in Hamilton. Dylan, a young person who attends their ‘Sunday Drop-in’ says, “Hyzone is a good place to come to because I am safe here and I get to meet staff and have a good laugh.”

- The vision of Madrassa Zia Ul Quran is to tackle problems of unemployment and exclusion in their community by providing computer and English language classes, particularly for women. The organisation works in the Pollokshields area of Glasgow and with the support FiSCAF is able to respond to need in their community.

FiSCAF will consider applications of up to £15 000 which may be spread over a maximum of 3 years (no more than £7,500 awarded in the first year). Applications are considered in June and November each year. The next deadline for applications is the end of April 2011. For more information about eligibility and applications please see our website www.fiscaf.org. If you have a project, or an idea for a project, please get in touch!
D. P. Thomson and the Tell Scotland Movement

Back near the beginning of the ecumenical movement in Scotland in the 1950s, many of the denominations co-operated with the inter-denominational Tell Scotland Movement that grew out of the BBC Radio Missions of 1950 and 1952. The foundation of Tell Scotland was the insight that the key to effective outreach lay with the parish or local congregation. Mission should not be something added to the Church’s life but an ordinary part of the Church’s witness: a continuous pattern of life within the local church Tell Scotland therefore sought ways to enable the evangelism of ordinary Christians.

The Movement generated large numbers of parish missions and visitation campaigns 1954-1958, and then the Kirk Weeks of 1957-1965. The Tell Scotland Committee became the Department of Mission of the Scottish Churches Council in 1964 and thus is part of the history of today’s ACTS.

The debates of the 1950s still have significance today and it may be of interest that the archives of the Tell Scotland Movement have been deposited by ACTS at New College, Edinburgh where they can be accessed through the library.

Partly based on the Tell Scotland archives is a new biography of Rev. D. P. Thomson, evangelist of the Church of Scotland’s Home Board, whose visitation methodology was much used in the 1950s. ‘DP’ concluded his own autobiography in 1967 with the plea: I am convinced that we have to understand one another better, and that, as far as our convictions will allow, we must be ready to pray and to work with one another.

The Scottish Storytelling Centre, 43-45 High Street, Edinburgh, is hosting a short event to mark the launch of Frank Bardgett’s Scotland’s Evangelist: D. P. Thomson from 2.30pm on 29 November. Rev. Peter Neilson and Dr John Berkeley will lead discussion on the echoes that still resonate from DP’s life and times. Please take this as an invitation to come!

Further information about the event from: jenny@scottishstorytellingcentre.com and about the book from Frank at: publications@bardgett.plus.com
PILGRIMAGE: A Mission Initiative by Scottish Churches Rural Group

Pilgrimage as an activity has been with us for much of the life of the church. Early pilgrimages were to the sites of key events such as Iona, Findhorn, Lindisfarne or to shrines attached to Saints eg Tain. The tradition of pilgrimage has remained important to those from Catholic traditions. What might pilgrimage offer to today's churches? Does it have anything to say to those from reformed traditions? Why might you want to undertake a pilgrimage? What is pilgrimage anyway? These are the questions to be explored at two events being promoted by SCRG in 2011. On Wednesday 23 February at the Parliament in Edinburgh we will explore with MSPs and officials from Government agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage, Visit Scotland and Scottish Enterprise what pilgrimage might do for our national identity and for the physical and mental health of the nation. We will emphasise the roles which churches, as a result of their proximity to the planned national longer distance footpath route, might do to help develop this national asset.

On Thursday 24 March at 121 George Street, Edinburgh (Church of Scotland Offices) we will meet as churches to review what pilgrimage has and still is doing today. We will explore its potential contribution to mission and how it might help the critical connection between urban and rural Scots.

Visiting rural churches is on the increase and is a significant reason for people to travel to rural Scotland. Pilgrimage does not have to be long distance journeying. It can be visits within an area as exemplified by the ‘thinking’ walk at Falkland (see ACTS website – Rural Commission) or the Frank Bruce Sculpture Trail near Aviemore. Pilgrimage always has elements of heritage, reflection or creation and the deepening of spiritual life. All of these matter to us as churches in Scotland and are further ways of contacting those for whom formal worship no longer meets their needs.

To the edge to find the Centre
Paul Heppleston

I went to Fair Isle last summer to meet God; there I was, looking for him on an island where rare birds outnumber the inhabitants every year. Next summer I'm off to Knoydart with the same intention. One year I went to St Kilda and another time I was in Colonsay in the Inner Hebrides.

You can quieten down, become centred in retreat houses; they provide stillness and spirit-moments and enable people to meet others, meet God, and meet themselves. They are a truly rich resource and we in Britain are very fortunate to have so many of them. So why go to these other places? Why bother to travel to far-flung places with a sense of the spiritual all about you?

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There are two treasures available to us as seekers for God. The first is our land: mountain, sea, island and shore, lake, river, moor and hill. These form what Celtic peoples called 'The Big Book' – the book in which we can ‘read God’ in the wideness and wildness of his creation. Here we can journey along ancient tracks and passes, maybe following in the footsteps of Celtic saints - and often feeling a sense of pilgrimage as we go; even if you are staying in one place (and you can’t travel very far on St Kilda) it’s possible to feel a sense of movement of the spirit even if not of the feet. The second treasure is each other. These two complement each other in the work of Journeying, a small non-profit-making organisation comprising a team of leaders who take small groups to remote and not-so-remote spots in Britain and Ireland in the spirit of peregrination. Formerly known as Pilgrim Adventure they have been doing this quietly and unobtrusively for over 20 years and each year they run 6-8 journeys to a variety of places in Britain and Ireland. Many of the trips are to Scottish destinations. The Celtic spirituality element is always close - though there is no heavy religiosity at all – and people of any faith, denomination or none are welcomed openly. Sometimes there is a greater emphasis on prayer-accompaniment and reflective companionship.

The shape of each journey is determined by the one or two (volunteer) leaders but, even with different personalities leading, there are elements common to each journey:- accommodation is usually of a self-catering style, just occasionally somewhere on a full-board basis; reflective worship takes place at the start and end of each day (and perhaps also at other times on the hill or by the shore); walks of varying length (you can opt in or out as you wish); times of sharing in the evening, maybe around a log fire – and the communion that is found so often when you are doing the washing-up together.

Highlights from me on recent journeys have included a simple eucharist at the tide’s edge, trudging over a Welsh moorland in the rain to reach the remains of an ancient Cistercian monastery just as a rainbow arched overhead; standing on a Hebridean island to watch the sun flash the waves with setting light; the strength shared by three of us sheltering from fierce wind on a remote hillside; weeping with deep joy as our group felt able to share feelings about our relationship with God as the embers crackled in a dying shore-fire.

The real essence of these journeys, for me, and for fellow travellers, is a companionship within the beauty of the natural world. To that is added the true spirit-presence that comes from being quiet together, laughing (and crying) together, sharing life’s stories and our understanding of God.

I believe there is no other group offering such journeys in our green and pleasant (and rugged and most beautiful) land; the Journeying idea appears to be unique in my experience and touches the depths of our being, transforming and enriching in ways which I am certain would be valued by many others.

For more information see www.journeying.co.uk
INTER-FaITH GROUP ON DOMESTIC ABUSE
EXHIBITION IN PAISLEY ABBEY

MONDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2010 TO THURSDAY 2ND DECEMBER 2010
10.30am - 3.30pm

At this event abuse in the home is portrayed by an exhibition of shoes. The collection of shoes on show, with their accompanying comments, will speak on behalf of abused individuals who suffer, and some who die, at the hands of their partner or ex-partner. Other comments come from people who journey with them and many of these reflections will represent a faith perspective.

“It is God's intention for all human beings, male, female, child and adult, to enjoy safety, freedom, dignity and fullness of life. Abuse in the home is a violation of God's wish for humanity as it can adversely affect an individual's relationship with God and also creates substantial damage within the family, in the community and in society as a whole”.

With timely help, many can escape from their abusive situation, rebuild their confidence and live in safety. The original idea for this exhibition came from the Y.W.C.A. and was entitled "104 Pairs of Shoes". Jean Urquhart, Chair

Violence Against Women

“If it were between countries, we’d call it a war.
If it were a disease, we’d call it an epidemic.
If it were an oil spill, we’d call it a disaster.
But it is happening to women, and it is just an everyday affair.
  It is violence against women.
It is sexual harassment at work and sexual abuse of the young.
  It is the beating or the blow that millions of women suffer each and every day.
  It is rape at home or on a date. It is murder.
  There’s no secret enemy pulling the trigger.
  No unseen virus that leads to death.
  It is only men. Not all men, but far too many men…………
  ……….. and just who are these men?
  Just regular guys.
  Men from all social backgrounds and of all colours and ages.
  Rich men and poor men, men who toil in the fields
  And men who sit behind desks.”

Michael Kaufman
Founder member of The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC)

Further information from: National Commission for Pastoral & Social Care, Cathedral Precincts, Incle Street, PAISLEY PA1 1HR Telephone; 0141 847 6137 Fax; 0141 887 4550 Office e mail: nacosoca.admin@btconnect.com
E Mail: nacosoca@btconnect.com Scottish Charity Number SCO 16650
A Commission of the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland. Catholic National Endowment Trust (also known as the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland).