Ecumenical Europe meets in Edinburgh

Ecumenical Organisations from across Europe met together in Edinburgh from 17 to 20 April 2012. They were hosted by CTBI (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) in partnership with ACTS. The conference theme was: ‘Church and Contemporary Culture: Threat or Opportunity’.

17 National Councils of Churches were represented by their General Secretaries along with 1 regional group (CTBI) and staff members from CEC (Conference of European Churches), CCME (Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe) and WCC (World Council of Churches). One of the group, Rev Guy Liagre, from Belgium, will shortly be taking up his appointment as the new CEC General Secretary.

The programme was designed to encourage conversation, sharing and reflection. Participants began with presentations about their national or international context and experience. Many common concerns emerged, including: church-state relations; political, economic and social conditions; aggressive secularism / atheism; sexuality issues; migration; new churches; ecumenical models and structures; the importance of ecumenical fellowship / relationships; and mutual recognition of Baptism. These concerns were explored in different ways throughout the four days.

Continued on back page.
Being at the Heart of our Rural Communities

The 2012 Scottish Churches Rural Group Conference, Friday 20\textsuperscript{th} July 2012, The House of Falkland, Falkland, Fife.

Rural Scotland covers over 90% of our land area but is home to only 18% of our population. This combination results in a need for things to be done differently to what is regarded as the norm for the major centres of population which are home to most in Scotland today. The distances between communities mean that many of the services which are easily provided in a centralised manner in our cities need to be provided by inhabitants themselves especially in our remote rural communities.

The annual Scottish Government publication on Key Facts relating to Rural Scotland highlights a number of significant differences from urban areas. Almost 80% of those who live in remote rural areas rate it as a very good place to live compared to 51% in urban areas with the sense of community rated as important by 85% of rural dwellers and around half (47%) of residents involved in voluntary activities; the comparable figures for urban were 70% and 27% respectively. The 2012 SCRG conference will focus on the range of things which communities can do to build on these differences in a positive way within community and the role which the church can play in helping to facilitate this. The past decades have witnessed the loss of facilities from our rural places which were once taken for granted.

Few rural centres now have a garage and the numbers with shops, post offices and pubs are declining in number. Among the features which is now the most common is the presence of a church and churches have risen to the task by helping to fill the gaps for example by beginning to run Post Offices, shops and becoming the centre of village activities. In part this is a reinvention of the past and a return to the church being at the heart of food production, social services, trade and community with more churches continuing to do things as part of their community role. While some activities, running Post Offices or community internet hubs are new, others such as running groups for disadvantaged groups in society or places for spiritual refreshment takes on a more traditional role.

The 2012 SCRG conference will explore these themes and link them to our updated information about exactly where our churches are. This work has come from a major study initiated by the Church of Scotland. Day Conf cost £15 (includes lunch) reservations to Shona Paterson ACTS – address on cover page •
Remembering Andrew Scobie

On 1st April this year, the Service at Cardross Parish Church included the Dedication of Stained Glass Windows in memory of Rev Andrew Scobie, who died on 11 October 2010, aged 75. The windows, a gift from the Scobie family in memory of Andrew bear words from the hymn he sang with gusto on his last Sunday in the church “You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace”

The windows were beautifully crafted by Susan Bradbury, of Kilmaurs and are a fitting memorial for the 45 years he spent as Minister at Cardross Parish Church. The occasion was marked by a meal in the church hall which was attended by more than 200 guests. Andrew’s wife Jeannette thanked those who had shared in his life and witness, and remembered many of the good times shared by all.

Scottish Churches Housing Action’s Starter Pack Network

Scottish Churches Housing Action are offering an online platform for organisations who run a starter pack project for homeless people.

The Starter Pack Network offers a space to exchange information on best practice, income generating activities and discuss possibilities of working more closely with each other.

The forum also gives access to some resources such as useful policies and procedures necessary to project development or management developed by Scottish Churches Housing Action.

If you run a starter pack project, are developing one, or simply interested to find out more, please contact: Elodie Mignard at: elodie@churches-housing.org

(Taken from Scottish Housing Action e-news and used with permission)
Scottish Churches working together at the Royal Highland Show

From 21st June to 24th June well over 170,000 people will attend the Royal Highland and Agricultural Show at Ingliston, Edinburgh, one of the largest gatherings in Scotland. Sixteen years ago a small band of volunteers organised by the Church of Scotland Rural Committee started the Churches Stand. Their vision was to show the Churches important role in rural areas of Scotland. From a small stand at the outskirts of the showground the Churches stand is now a prime location at the centre of the show.

The Church of Scotland invited the Scottish Churches Rural Group to join this important outreach and the ecumenical nature of the stand developed, illustrating Christian Churches in Scotland working together. The Church stand is housed in a marquee which hosts an exhibition of the work of the Churches in rural Scotland.

Prayer starts the day at the stand and a ‘prayer net’ picks up prayer requests from visitors during the day which are incorporated into a daily act of worship and prayer at the end of the day.

There is a Fair Trade coffee stop at the stand where people can rest and the stand volunteers’ can spend time in conversation with them. The theme of the importance of the Rural Community, and the Churches role in that, will be the theme for this years show.

Ten Church Leaders will visit the stand at 10am on Thursday 21 June. They represent the Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church, Church of Scotland, Salvation Army, United Reformed Church, Congregational Federation, Baptist Union of Scotland, Methodist Church, Scottish Episcopal Church and Action of Churches Together in Scotland and will be given a tour round the show. On Thursday afternoon at 3pm there will be a launch of a document on Sustainable Farming.

Continued…..
Friday will be a day when people from many of the Rural Communities call at the stand. Saturday and Sunday at the show are family days and the stand caters for this with face painters and a puppet ministry team outreaching to families.

The Churches in Scotland are engaged with Government on Rural matters and many politicians will call at the stand. We give thanks for the way that the Scottish Government consults us on a wide range of issues which affect the Rural areas in Scotland. Joining us this year will be SCVO Rural Direct who will bring a funding sheet specifically for Churches.

Each year is a real opportunity for the rural community and representatives to come to talk to the rural and urban public about rural issues but it also shows how the Churches can play such a large role demonstrating real care and concern in so many aspects of Scottish life.

Please do come and see us at Avenue O stand 635.

Bill Harvey Convener of Scottish Churches Rural Group.
“What matters now in children’s ministry in Scotland?”

Two Conferences organised by the Working with Children in the Church Community Group will focus on the above theme. If it is a theme which matters to you, then put one of the following dates in your diary now –

10\textsuperscript{th} November, when the Conference will be held in the Hilton Doubletree Hotel in Aberdeen, or 24\textsuperscript{th} November, when the venue will be St. Paul’s and St. George’s Episcopal Church in the centre of Edinburgh.

The Working with Children Group hopes that the programme planned for the Conferences will provide inspiration and support for those who work with primary school aged children in their congregations. Amongst the topics which speakers will address are Leadership, Worship and Story. There will also be workshops exploring how Creativity, Bible, Home, Schools, Starting from Scratch and Inclusion matter now.

Full details of the Conference programme and booking forms will be issued in August. The Conference fee, which will cover attendance, lunch and coffees/teas will be £10.

ACTS’ Website developments.

In the last few months a number of new sections have been added to the ACTS website which can be accessed at www.acts-scotland.org

Following on from the very successful programme of conferences that the Working With Children Core Group have run, a number of workshops from these events are now downloadable as ready-to-use workshops. There are also links to a variety of organisations providing innovative ideas for working with children in the church community. Click on the ‘Working with Children’ tab to access this material.

A new group that ACTS is helping to facilitate is a network for people engaged in chaplaincy in Further Education Colleges. The network is currently sharing examples of different resource material and these can be accessed by clicking on the ‘FE Chaplains’ tab.

Another of ACTS newer groups is the Scottish Churches Anti-Human Trafficking Group. They also have a new section on the website where you can find the Group’s strategy for action to address the potential increase in trafficking connected with the 2014 Commonwealth Games; an information leaflet based on the strategy and news of the group’s activities including a copy of a letter to all MSPs on the issue of trafficking.
Big Tent, Scotland’s largest Environment and Music Festival will this year focus on a series of themes. SCRG will have a role in the running of the Soil, Soul and Story Theme. Like our presence at the Highland show, being at Big Tent allows the churches to meet people where they have come for knowledge and to engage with them in their spiritual journeys. The theme will be based in the ruined chapel and will explore the relationship between the three elements in both a local and a Scottish context. Soil represents both the place from which we came and the gift from our creator which allows us to be fed and to interrelate to God’s creation. Soul reminds us of the gift of life and that we all have a spiritual element which is distinct from our physical selves and the world. Story is at the heart of our fellowship with others, of our heritage and our journeying individually and as a society. The chapel as the base for this theme reminds us of the transience of the things we create compared to the continuity and timelessness of God’s works.

We all have a soul which is unseen but may represent a different person to the one outwardly visible as the above illustration taken from one of the presentations made at SCRG Pilgrimage Conference in 2011 illustrates so graphically.

During the days it is intended to illustrate the linkage of the three themes by the use of poetry, prose, discussion and reflective quietness, Writings about the importance of soil and soul can be drawn from scripture and from more recent writers as diverse as Rachel Carson, Eve Balfour and even Richard Dawkins. The history of Falkland and of the chapel remind us of place and the use of story in conserving our heritage while the use of poetry emphasises that image and sound are important in the development and communication of our spirituality. Bookings for and more information about the Big Tent event can be obtained via the Falkland Centre for Stewardship web site.

www.centreforstewardship.org.uk
Future of Scotland Initiative

The Trustees of ACTS support the ‘Future of Scotland’ initiative. In response to the proposed referendum, SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) launched the campaign to widen and deepen the debate about the Future of Scotland by encouraging organisations across Scotland to share their concerns and reflections. ACTS encourages its member churches to consider the values that should underpin and inform our society and to participate in this initiative – for the good of all in our society.

ACTS will be posting information about the Future of Scotland initiative on its website, where there also is a link to the Future of Scotland website http://www.futureofscotland.org

Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum – The Way Forward

In February, a gathering of 25 individuals representing pilgrim route interests across Scotland met in Culross, Fife and agreed to set up a Forum to promote the exchange of information, expertise and knowledge as a mutual self-help network. The new Steering Group set up to take this forward, which includes ACTS SCRG representation, has now drafted a constitution which will give the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum a distinct identity and operating framework as a voluntary association. Work is now in hand to create a Forum website and develop periodic events to promote best practice in creating designated, waymarked routes with the infrastructure to provide a distinctive pilgrimage experience for the walker, cyclist, rider or canoeist. Local working groups led by Forum members will take forward the development of specific routes, with attention initially focused on Pilgrim Trails in Ayrshire and Fife and a long distance east-west route linking St Andrews and Iona. For more information contact Nick Cooke on Nick@clearserv.co.uk

Church Synods and Assemblies

It is a busy time of the year for church synods, assemblies and other decision-making bodies. As is the custom, ACTS is represented at most of these by various Trustees, Staff and other colleagues. It is always good to share a little of the joys and tribulations of our sisters and brothers, our partner churches. These can be difficult times in our churches and communities. We encourage you to remember in your prayers all those with leadership responsibilities in our churches.
If you are on Facebook then we encourage you to join the ACTS Facebook page as a further way of receiving information from ACTS - just type in ‘Action of Churches Together in Scotland’ in the search facility. There is also a ‘Churches in Rural Scotland’ group which includes news and information from the Scottish Churches Rural Group.

The Queen’s Jubilee Service
The Queen will be attending a special service to mark her Diamond Jubilee on Tuesday 5 June in St Paul’s Cathedral, London. Many Churches are planning to screen the service in their own church or include it as part of a bigger event. The service starts at 10.30am and the Order of Service is likely to be available the week before. There is a specially written prayer for the Queen which you can access from www.stpauls.co.uk - The BBC are planning to film big Jubilee Lunches for broadcast on 3rd June from towns and cities around the UK. For more information please email office@hopetogether.org.uk

Racial Justice Sunday 2012
The national Racial Justice Sunday Service, organised by ACTS and by Minority Ethnic Christians Together in Scotland (MECTIS), is to be held in Morningside United Church, Edinburgh, on September 9th. Between 18.00 and 18.30 the Edinburgh African Choir will present a programme of songs of praise as people assemble for the Service.

The theme for the Service will be “Growing Together in Faith” and the preacher will be Rev. Aftab Gohar, who is minister of Abbotsgrange Parish Church, Grangemouth.

You are cordially invited to attend the Service and, by doing so, to show your support for the Churches’ work to ensure that people of all races are treated justly by the society in which they live.
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

ANNUAL MEETING OF SCOTTISH FRIENDS OF ECUMENISM
SATURDAY 23 JUNE 10.30am -4.00pm
CATHEDRAL HALLS, DUNBLANE

PROGRAMME
10.30am Gather, Registration, Coffee/Tea
11.00am Welcome and Time for Reflection

“THE FUTURE OF SCOTLAND”
This session will consider the issues involved in the Referendum on Scotland’s future. A speaker with experience of church and nation matters will give both input and time for those present to participate in discussion.

12.45pm Lunch (provided)
1.45pm Annual General Meeting of SFoE

“ THE FUTURE OF SCOTTISH FRIENDS OF ECUMENISM”
The Report of the Think-Tank will be debated; and Resolutions put before the Meeting.
The rest of the Agenda, including Convener’s and Treasurer’s reports will follow

3.30pm Concluding Prayers

REGISTRATIONS TO
Margaret Stewart
28 Inch Cres Bathgate EH48 1EU

Email scoesecy@gmail.com

Resources for Rural Places of Worship

The Arthur Rank Centre has provided an answer for the many rural congregations of all denominations struggling with church buildings that are seen as a burden rather than a blessing. The charity has created an online information hub guiding a church in all it needs to transform its building from a millstone to an asset.

Resources for Rural Places of Worship is a free online resource developed in response to findings that, for many, church buildings are a drain of time, energy and money. It signposts people from churches of all denominations to the broadest range of available information and help.

Resources for Rural Places of Worship is available free at

http://www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/publications-and-resources/rural-church-buildings
On Thursday 17 May 2012, First Minister Alex Salmond met with senior figures from ten Scottish Churches to discuss current issues facing society and the Church. These included sharing serious concerns about fostering, kinship care and child poverty; despite some significant progress the present economic reality means that there remain real challenges in achieving targets and improving standards across the country.

The First Minister stressed the importance of forthcoming legislation on children’s care and support. The related topic of marriage and the recent consultation was also discussed. The Church leaders and representatives raised the issue of the role of faith and Christianity in the public square. The First Minister recognised and affirmed the positive contribution of churches and all faith communities to the common good. He encouraged the Churches to continue to be steadfast in the practical outworking of their faith and for individuals to have confidence to share with others what and why they believe.

This annual meeting illustrates the increasingly active engagement between Churches and civic society in Scotland, both nationally and locally.

First Minister Alex Salmond said: “This annual meeting provided, once again, an opportunity for me to thank senior representatives of Scotland’s churches for their commitment to supporting our communities. It also provided an opportunity to hear their views on a range of issues, the issues being discussed in and out of churches the length and breadth of Scotland. “The issues that concern the churches are issues that concern government - such as how we can best deliver better lives for vulnerable children, particularly those growing up in relative poverty. I am very much aware of the efforts of the churches in this area and their experiences do, and will continue to, inform our approach.

“Scotland is a better place because it is home to a number of faiths - and I am clear that people should be able to express their faith openly and proudly.”
There were several highlights in the programme. On Wednesday, the group took part in a 90 minute Contextual Bible Study ‘conversation’ on Matthew 15:21-28: Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite Woman. This was followed by a 2 hour session led by Alison Elliot. She gave a 20 minute reflection on contemporary Scotland and then led a wide-ranging discussion touching on many of the issues mentioned above.

On Thursday, the group had a very stimulating visit to the Scottish Parliament. The visit was hosted by Alex Fergusson MSP. He described the way the parliament was designed – both as a building and as a servant of and resource for all the people of Scotland. The churches’ Parliamentary Officers joined the group for part of the morning, answering questions from the group about their work with parliament. This was followed by First Minister’s Question Time – quite an experience in itself. The visit closed with a presentation by Roseanna Cunningham, Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (with responsibility for tackling sectarianism). Over lunch, she and Alex Fergusson led another wide-ranging discussion. Five other MSPs joined the group for the lunch and discussion.

The final highlight was on Thursday evening when Leaders / Representatives of ACTS Member Churches joined the group for dinner followed by discussion. The discussion was facilitated by Rev John Fulton (UF) with short reflections by Rev Lily Twist (M), Rev David Chillingworth (SEC) and V Rev Sheilagh Kesting (CofS). Again the range and depth of contributions and participation was highly appreciated by everyone.

Feedback from the group was very positive. Participants were struck by the facilitative / conversational methodologies chosen for the meeting, especially the Bible study. They were highly impressed with the open and respectful relationships between the churches and the parliamentarians and among the Scottish church leaders / representatives. Overall, they were very pleased to have had the experience of such in-depth sharing and discussion without too rigid an agenda.

The annual meeting of ENCC General Secretaries provides important peer group support for those working ecumenically at this level. The 2013 meeting is being planned by Finland and Estonia.

Br Stephen Smyth