Many people consider that, whatever the decision of the Referendum on the future of Scotland on 18 Sept 2014, relationships among and across our churches and nations are facing significant change.

To help address this, ACTS recently hosted a conference, ‘Churches and Nations – Possible Implications of the Referendum on the Future of Scotland’, designed for people with senior ecumenical responsibility from across Scotland,
England, Wales and Ireland. 48 delegates took part: the National Ecumenical Instruments (ACTS, CTBI, CTE, Cytun and ICC)* and 18 denominations being represented.

The approach was participatory and conversational. Formal input came from some well known presenters: Dr Alison Elliot (Impact of the Referendum on Contemporary Scotland); Dr Donald Smith (Crossing Borders: Culture and Faith); Rev Dr Graham Blount (From Stateless Nation to Nation State?); Rev Dr David Cornick (Scottish Decisions, British Consequences? The Referendum and Cross-Border Churches); and, V Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting and Rev William McFadden (Identity and Identities: Called to Be One? A Theological Reflection).

There was plenty of time for informal input and reflection – not least at the conference dinner. Then we were joined, and briefly addressed, by Rt Rev John Armes (SEC, Bishop of Edinburgh), M Rev Mario Conti (RC, Archbishop Emeritus of Glasgow), V Rev Alan McDonald (CofS, Former Moderator of General Assembly), and Rev Francis Alao (General Secretary of MECTIS – Minority Ethnic Christians Together in Scotland) who was a delegate to the conference. They each shared important considerations about the role of the churches, encouraging participation in the referendum, maintaining relationships afterwards, the history and current social context of Scotland, and questions about the kind of society we wish to have, including issues around immigration and inclusion.

Worship was led by Rev Carolyn Smyth (URC). The facilitation was led by Helen Hood (Convener of ACTS), Br Stephen Smyth (retiring General Secretary) and a small team drawn from across the Scottish Churches.

The conference produced no ‘formal papers’ or ‘reports’. Rather, there was plenty of passion and rich, lively, informative and challenging input and discussion. Delegates were charged with taking the conversation back to their churches and
organisations. A few practical initiatives have been proposed by way of follow up. We hope to be able to share something of these later in the run up to the referendum.

The Scottish delegates and Churches are encouraging people – however they decide to vote – to consider the values they would wish to see in Scottish society, to engage in the national debate leading up to the referendum, to exercise their vote and to actively work for the common good for everyone in our society.

Whatever the decision on 18 Sept this year, relationships among and across our churches and nations are facing significant change.

The following resource materials may be of interest to some readers:


Matthew Ross takes over Post as General Secretary of ACTS.

Following the retirement of Brother Stephen Smyth at the end of March 2014, ACTS Trustees recently announced that Rev Matthew Ross (Church of Scotland) has been appointed the next ACTS General Secretary. Matthew will take up the post on 1 April 2014.

Matthew is currently a parish minister in Midlothian and is a member of the Church of Scotland's Church and Society Council and Ecumenical Relations Committee. His wide ecumenical experience includes six years in Brussels as Executive Secretary of the Church and Society Commission of the CEC (Conference of European Churches).

We look forward to working with Matthew as we further develop ecumenical relationships and action on behalf of the Churches through ACTS.

ACTS moves from Networks to Programme Groups.

ACTS is currently undergoing a change to the way in which it engages with its many groups. OUT are the Networks, and IN we are welcoming more focussed Programme Groups. The main difference is that groups will be drawn together from the churches to work on a specific topic, for a specific length of time and will have a purpose which will produce an end result at the conclusion of the Programme Group’s work. Many of the old Associated Ecumenical Groups have already applied for funding and new status and look forward to this exciting change of style.
Ecumenism is Alive and Well in Alloa

St. John’s Episcopal Church and Ludgate Church of Scotland in Alloa took a radical step ten months ago to worship together and to share each others traditions whilst St. John’s List B building underwent a programme of restoration.

An open hearted welcome awaited St. John’s congregation and from that moment the two congregations integrated and strong relationships were founded. Once a quarter we shared in each other Holy Communion, though St. John’s celebrated Communion after the main service each week, as is their tradition, to which members of Ludgate often attended.

Worship on a Sunday was shared between Rev Jim Cochrane (Ludgate) and the Very Rev John Shone (St. John’s) taking turn about to preach or to lead the Intersessions; reading of the two lessons was also shared between the congregations.

On the final Sunday together we began morning service at Ludgate Church and then both congregations walked together to St. John’s Church to celebrate Communion together in the restored building. Over 110 people shared this wonderful experience. It is our intention to worship together at intervals in both churches throughout the year, such is the depth of relationships formed.

On Friday 7th February a Service of Rededication was held with a service led by Bishop David Chillingworth, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. A congregation of over 100 were there to welcome the Light of Christ back into this very special listed church. It marked a new beginning for the work of the congregation in reaching out into the community to fulfill God’s call to mission.
St. John’s is a church served by retired clergy and has been led by a lay Collaborative Leadership Team for many years. This ecumenical experience for both churches was not founded on theological points or principles, but on personal relationships developed initially through the Alloa Churches Forum. The lesson of this ecumenical opportunity emphasised that we shared more in common with other denominations than the number of differences. The differences were there to be celebrated and not to divide, so Ecumenism is alive and well in Alloa.

Joan Pennycook

Royal Highland Show
Scottish Churches’ Rural Group invite everyone to visit their stand this June (19th – 21st) for an informal chat and a coffee! The focus of this year’s show is ‘energy’ looking at the impact of renewable energy to communities throughout Scotland. The Planning Group are working hard preparing the programme over the four days and promise to have something for everyone, including a family focus theme on Saturday and Sunday.

EASTER RESOURCE
NOW AVAILABLE
FROM ACTS
‘Making Choices’

This year’s Easter Resource is now available to download free from the ACTS website www.acts-scotland.org ‘Making Choices’ was prepared by a team from the Salvation Army and looks at the impact of choices made, and especially of those choices made by others leading up to the crucifixion. This resource will provide an interesting read and a good choice of study material this Holy Week.
**Meaningful Words**

Scottish Churches’ Children’s Group would like to invite those working with children in the church to share meaningful moments in their mission and ministry. If you have something you would like to share with them, and are happy for it to be included in the ACTS website, please send (about 200 words) to shonapaterson@acts-scotland.org

**Scottish Rural Parliament**

Did you know that Scotland’s first Rural Parliament meets this year from 6–8 November in Oban? Scottish Churches Rural Group are part of the Advisory Group and will be attending this important event. A mixture of people living and working in rural communities, as well as representatives of organisations with an interest in rural Scotland, and also other decision makers ie MSPs and local councillors will also be there. At the moment they are expecting 400 people to attend of which 75% will be people from Scotland’s rural communities. If you would like to know more about Scotland’s first Rural Parliament visit: www.scottishparliament.org.uk

**Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum Meeting**

A meeting of the SPRF takes place on 24 April 2014 at St Mungo’s Museum of Religious Life & Art, Glasgow from 9.30am (registration) to 4pm (tea and depart). This event offers a full programme with many interesting Speakers and it’s open to non members but must be booked and paid in advance.

Further details from www.sprf.org.uk
Retreat in Daily Life

A retreat in daily life (RDL) provides an opportunity for people to combine retreat and reflection with their day to day lives. *Adventures in Faith*, a service of SEC’s Diocesan of Edinburgh are hosting an event in Edinburgh which will give people the opportunity to meet with a trained prayer-guide for half an hour a time, over a period of six weeks. This kind of retreat enables our unique relationship with God to focus on our daily lives with family, work and leisure. This year’s event starts on Sunday at the City’s St John’s on 27th April 3-5pm and goes on until Sunday 8th June 3-5pm (venue to be confirmed). If you would like to know more about this event please contact: freda.alexander1@btinternet.com

Christian Aid Week
11 – 17 May

Christian Aid Week raises about £12 million in the UK and Ireland each year helping to give people a future without fear. If you haven’t already organised an event but would like to and don’t know where to start, visit the website www.christianaid.org.uk There are inspirational ideas and tips for signed-up collectors, local fundraising opportunities for new volunteers in your area, as well as films and resources to help you. Why not give it a go?

The Penny Gospel

Last year the Scottish Bible Society launched a major gospel project. The aim of the Penny Gospel is simple - share the story of Jesus with the people of Scotland in the run-up to and during the Commonwealth Games. The vision of the project has been grasped across Scotland, with over 250,000 copies already printed. A second print run has been agreed to seek and raise the money they need to continue to sell them for one penny. It’s not too late for you to place an order. 160,000 have already been requested. Find out more and place an order. Or go to www.scottishbiblesociety.org for this and lots more.