

## **Witnessing to Christian Unity**

*A sermon from Methodist Minister The Revd John Boardman, at the United Service in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, on Sunday 17 January 2010 at the catholic church of Our Lady and St John's, Sudbury.*

Yesterday marked the start of the 8-day Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2010. Attendance at various Sudbury churches during the week and coming to Kettle and Fish on Thursday will demonstrate the commitment of many of us to Christian Unity.

Paul drew the analogy of the Christian Church being like a body. I believe it can be similar also to a family, with other denominations being part of the family of Christ. How can we be witnesses to the family of the Church in Sudbury and beyond? How can we be seen to actively support Christian Unity?

In responding to Jesus' command to eat bread and drink wine as his body and blood in remembrance of him, the material stuff of creation, in the form of grain and grapes, becomes a sign and sacrament of God's presence with us. Through participation in Christ, we are made capable of lives we could not otherwise live. We are transformed from individual disciples into members of his one body, no longer dependent on ourselves but bound together in the life of our Lord. I suggest three ways in which we can be witnesses for Christ's family in today's world: Support for the Environment, Support for Ecumenism and Support for the Poor.

### **Support for the Environment**

In Genesis, we read several times, "God looked at what he had done and it was good." The Psalms praise God for his majesty and the beauty of our world. "You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly." However, we are witnesses to modern environmental disasters. There are rapidly changing phenomena in nature which many attribute to human beings and they adversely affect the world's poor most.

Recently in London and Glasgow, thousands of people attended "The Wave." It was an occasion to make politicians aware of the strength of feeling about climate issues before December's Copenhagen Summit. Before the march in London an ecumenical service was held. Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, Joel Edwards, former director of the Evangelical Alliance amongst others supported this action for climate change. We should be moving forward in hope and in the knowledge of God's grace.

Now in the cold grey light of January 2010, what are we left with? It is up to us to do our bit; to think globally and act locally. For example, churches can try to attain the ecocongregation award. We can all do a little to help make Sudbury a more attractive place, like picking up litter and doing more cycling and walking.

## **Support for Ecumenism**

Secondly we can be Christian witnesses by supporting the Christian family of churches.: "Whoever loves God must also love his brother." I think this applies very much to the family of the Christian Church. One reason my wife and I are delighted to live in Sudbury is the genuine family feel to the churches here. It is wonderful to see active ecumenism in Kettle and Fish at St Peters on Thursdays. It is great to see the early risers on Saturday mornings meeting at 8:00 for porridge and prayer. There is enthusiasm for the joint production of "The Easter Story" with for example; actors, costume makers and technical staff all coming from Sudbury and District's churches. My standing in a Roman Catholic pulpit is testament to the strong commitment to the family of the Christian church here. It would be good to see even more support for ecumenical events. Perhaps we might have more exchanging of pulpits within the town's churches and ecumenical Bible studies.

## **Support for the Poor**

The third way in which we can be seen to be supporters of the Christian family here is in our care for the poor. Bono, the lead singer of U2 said in 2006, "It's no coincidence that in the Scriptures poverty is mentioned more than 2100 times. You know the only time Christ is judgemental is on the subject of the poor 'As you have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me.'" When we buy something, do we think about the people who helped to grow, make or transport that item?

I am sure many people here regularly support a Christian charity like Christian Aid, CAFOD and TEAR Fund. Many of you have given to helping relieve the current suffering in Haiti. However most of these agencies support by giving aid. The Fairtrade Foundation believes that it is through trade rather than aid that a community can be helped to flourish. Many churches in Sudbury are signed up supporters of Fairtrade. This means that the tea, sugar and coffee producers have received a fair price, the workers are treated fairly and the producers' community receive a social premium to develop facilities that we take for granted like clinics, schools and clean water.

When Nigel Bennett was Sudbury's Mayor, the town council passed a resolution to support Fairtrade as a council. I am not sure whether the council is still a Fairtrade supporter. The Fairtrade Foundation encourages towns, cities and counties to be signed up Fairtrade supporters. I would dearly love Sudbury to become an accredited Fairtrade town.

By these three means amongst others, support for the environment, support for ecumenism and support for the poor we are witnesses of Christ's love to the world. As the writer to the Hebrews said, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus." Through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, we can do more than we ever thought possible. Let us unite the Christian Church around those doctrines and values that we hold dear, and be radiating witnesses of the love of Jesus here in Sudbury and worldwide.