

Distributed January 2019

**Dear Member**

Happy New Year!

This AIF News Bulletin contains several articles, including:

1. London Meeting and Annual General Meeting 2019
2. Reflections on the AIF Jubilee Weekend 2018
3. Spiritual Conversations – A request by Ruth Reardon
4. A message from Adrienne Gordon and a Tribute to Ian Gordon by Keith Lander

If you have any news or articles to share with members, please continue to send them to me. Please also continue to check the website and our Facebook and Twitter pages for information and articles between the bulletins.

Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support for the Association and its work. If you have any questions about any of the information in the bulletin, please contact me.

With best wishes

**Doral Hayes**  
**Executive Development Officer**



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**Association of Interchurch Families, 10 Aldersgate Street, EC1A 4HJ**  
*info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk Tel: 020 3384 2947. www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk*

Registered Charity No. 283811

Presidents: The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster; Bishop Tim Thornton; The Free Churches Moderator, Rev Dr Hugh Osgood; and Dr Ruth Reardon

## 1. London Meeting and Annual General Meeting 2019

Further to the message sent out before Christmas we are delighted to announce that the AIF London Meeting and AGM will take place on 30 March 2019.

As well as sharing time and worship together, our speaker will be the Revd. Dr Susan Durber who is Minister at Taunton United Reformed Church and Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The focus of our meeting will be to learn more about the WCC document "The Church: Towards A Common Vision"; to hear how the Churches have responded to it; and to discuss how AIF could respond. The venue will be St Pancras Church Hall near Euston Station.

Please do put this date in your diaries and note that due to venue availability the meeting will start at a slightly later time than usual, more details will be sent out to members with the formal AGM paperwork next month.

## 2. Reflections on the AIF Jubilee Weekend 2018

The AIF Jubilee Weekend was like no other AIF weekend (or earlier conference) due to the number of special guests and speakers who were invited to be with us. There was a celebratory mood and a packed programme of worship, speaker sessions and social time, all providing an opportunity for Members to hear from a range of voices and equally importantly to share time together and share their experiences and views with our guests.

The timetable for the weekend included a keynote speech from Archbishop Bernard Longley, a longstanding member of AIF, and reflections from AIF Free Church President, Rev. Dr Hugh Osgood and Anglican President Bishop Tim Thornton followed by a Q&A session with a panel which included Bob Fyfe from CTBI and Thomas Knieps Port Le Roi from INTAMs. There was then a special Evensong Service led by Bishop Tim with prayers by Archbishop Bernard and a sermon by Rev. Hugh, which was followed by a drinks reception and a celebratory dinner with (short) speeches and, in the style of the Oscars and BAFTA, the presentation of a "lifetime achievement award" to Ruth Reardon. The evening ended with Night Prayers led by Antony and Janet Denman followed by more social time together.

Sunday morning started with a bible study led by Rev. Dr Callan Slipper, a keynote speech by Ruth Reardon and an accompanying reflection by Dame Mary Tanner. We also heard from interchurch couples, Martyn & Rosie Baker, and Marian & Stephen Judd about their experience of AIF. The weekend was drawn to a close with Mass, celebrated by Fr Dominic Robinson which included a sermon from Rev. Dr Paul Goodliff, the new General Secretary of CTE. Goodbyes were said over a last cup of tea during which members and guests observed that the weekend had left them with much to be grateful for and to reflect on.

One of our guests, Dr Elizabeth Davies described it as a "*tour de force*" and expressed how privileged she felt to be part of the weekend and, particularly, the worship. Many members kindly sent messages of thanks to Lucy, Paul and myself and I am grateful to Liz Bebington, Nick Shields and Helen and Richard Connell who have kindly sent in their own reflections of the weekend. Together these three very different pieces help present what was a very special, if exhausting, time together and I am grateful to all those who made time to be with us and celebrate 50 years of the Association.

*Doral Hayes*

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*Impressions by Nick Shields*

Jane and I attended our first AIF meeting on this special Jubilee occasion. It would be fair to say that it was not what we expected, in the best possible way. We may have expected an embattled group of people, although some of its battles may have been won. Sharing worship and fellowship is no longer a bit odd. Young people look for belief, not denomination. When we were married, 49 years ago, it was in the heady aftermath of the second Vatican Council, the Catholic Parish Priest invited his Anglican opposite number to assist and the only person who had to use the sacristy was the Registrar, in those days before authorised persons.

What we found nearly fifty years later was a group of people living out what the church- especially the Catholic church- ought now to be, as the Pope tells Catholics to get back on the Vatican II rails.

We found a warm welcome and a friendly community, supported by committed Presidents. Newness was spotted and nurtured. Difference was celebrated in a relaxed and natural way, as Christians should. Thanks for a refreshing and stimulating weekend.

*An Anglican perspective on the current state and prospects for ecumenical relationships*

*by Helen and Richard Connell*

Bishop Tim Thornton was asked to give his thoughts on ecumenical relationships in the light of the history of AIF. He began by asking us to reflect on the question 'One surprise you would like to bring about in your church.' I immediately thought about shared communion, but he didn't ask for feedback.

He highlighted the lower numbers of church members which is affecting all churches. He said lower numbers make churches look inwards and leaves them with no energy for ecumenical work. It created a lack of trust between the churches particularly at a national level. He suggested we look at the ecumenical journey through the Celtic understanding of travelling. You will never reach the destination but that shouldn't stop you setting out. In the light of this the churches should present to the world Hope which is a distinctive Christian gift. Why would anyone have hope? God is surprised by hope.

Hope 2 Fear 0

AIF epitomizes Christian hope which Bishop Tim Thornton described on Saturday. This was demonstrated in the testimonies shared by fellow members of the association. These were described as A Tale of Two Centuries, the Bakers representing the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the Judds the 21<sup>st</sup>. The Association brings hope to couples and institutions alike for a positive future.

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*AIF Jubilee Weekend – Some personal reflections (in no particular order!)*

*by Liz Bebington*

1. I don't remember ever seeing the Hayes so busy ... but we weren't disturbed by others and as usual, the eating and conference arrangements, helped by the AIF lanyards, worked well.
2. Smiling faces, lovely flowers and the AIF banners and table cloths in our meeting hall made us feel welcome.
3. As always superb worship. Would that all evensong services were as thoughtful as the one on Saturday night. We might not have a choir but there was lusty committed singing – and great words from all involved. Mass on Sunday felt spontaneous, joyful and spiritual all at once. And the Night Prayers were very different, with the powerful imagery of the jig saw – and the missing pieces - carried over to Sunday morning.
4. Sitting on allocated round tables encourages us to speak to some we might not know well, and is good for discussion times, but there were some attending I hardly spoke to, if at all. I came away wishing I'd made more effort to seek out the faces I couldn't put names to.
5. I note the front of the conference programme says 'A celebration of the part that AIF has played in the building of ecumenical relationships over the past 50 years.' I think we achieved that. Interesting to see how our guests used the opportunity to talk to each other, as well as to us. And to hear how they feel we have kept, and still need to keep, the pain of denominational division, as well as the potential of the domestic church, in people's minds.
6. I'm glad there was time for AIF members to share with us – but sad that many of our guests missed their testimonies. Especially good to hear about Adoremus, the RC Eucharistic Congress, first hand.
7. I felt our guests were clear in saying we still have a role in being a Voice to the Churches, and witnessing to our lived experiences, and to the joys, as well as the pains, of living in more than one tradition, even if the demand for support needed by couples entering on an Interchurch Marriage is lessening – or being sought in a different way in this internet age.
8. Interesting to hear some of our guests reflecting on how lived faith is changing among younger people – that they engage in issues eg of justice rather than structures and do not worry so much about membership.
9. We enjoyed the Celebration meal on Saturday night and felt the Hayes staff made significant efforts to make it special. It was lovely to have the speeches and presentations while we were all together in one place – had we moved to the conference hall we would inevitable have 'lost' some people.
10. Powerful discussion at one meal time that we are the Association of Interchurch Families, not Interchurch Couples, and so there is still a place for those whose spouse has died while they wish to belong. Does losing your spouse need to mean losing their denominational links? We didn't think so.

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### 3. A Spiritual Conversations – A request by Ruth Reardon

I wrote an article recently for *One in Christ* about what's new in the 2018 German bishops' orientation document on eucharistic sharing in interchurch families. This included a description of the method they propose to help couples decide whether sharing communion will bring them closer to God. Couples need to come to a decision on whether they have a real need to receive communion together, and whether the non-Catholic partner shares Catholic eucharistic faith. The bishops invite them to seek a 'spiritual conversation' with their priest or another person appointed to offer this pastoral care, so that they can come to a decision which follows their own consciences as well as preserving the unity of the church. If they decide affirmatively, their decision will be respected by the Catholic Church, and the bishop will be happy to welcome them to share communion in the eucharist.

The bishops liken this conversation to that of Jesus who walked on Easter Day with two of his disciples on the way to Emmaus from Jerusalem. He follows them, accompanies them, listens to their explanation of why they are so sad. He opens the scriptures to them, helping them to understand the saving significance of his own suffering, so that their hearts burned as they listened to him. And then they recognise who he is as he blesses the bread and breaks it for them at the evening meal. They return to Jerusalem and share their faith in Christ with the entire early church. The bishops also base their proposal for a 'spiritual conversation' with a priest or other minister, on the advice given by St Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*, when an important decision is to be taken. The conversation must be with Christ himself, who will show the way forward, and the decision must be for whatever is most conducive to communion with God.

It occurred to me that many interchurch couples have in fact had this kind of experience at different points in their lives. I thought of hearing a story recently told by a couple looking back on the early days of their marriage. A young English Catholic and her Methodist husband went on holiday to France. 'We shall be able to receive communion together there', she said happily. Before mass they approached the parish priest, who looked shocked and said no, it couldn't happen. The Catholic wife burst into tears, and the priest was upset when he realised what a serious matter it was for the couple. 'Come and see me this afternoon', he said. When they arrived they found that the priest had asked two or three parishioners who spoke English to help him in the conversation. They asked the Methodist why he wanted to receive communion so much, and what he believed about the eucharist. It was a good talk, in a mixture of French and English. Later the couple received a phone call from the priest: the Methodist husband would be most welcome to receive communion, and the following Sunday the priest made this very clear. He asked the Catholic wife to be one of the special ministers of communion, so the Methodist had the joy of receiving the chalice from his wife.

I used this story as an example in my article, because I thought it brought to life the German bishops' proposal for a 'spiritual conversation'. I think it could be of value to collect a number of such stories, if only to show that the 'spiritual conversation' has already been a serious and helpful reality in the lives of some interchurch couples. In making their proposal the German bishops have not acted lightly (as some critics have claimed) but with pastoral understanding of the needs of some interchurch families. Have you a story to tell? If so I would be very grateful to hear it. (Please contact Ruth at [aifreardon@talk21.com](mailto:aifreardon@talk21.com) if used, any stories would remain anonymous).

**Comment from Paul Docherty:** The AIF weekend in October will consider the German bishop's document and we will focus particularly on the concept of "spiritual conversation" – guided, we hope, by Fr Dominic who will discuss the German bishop's proposal in the light of Ignatian spiritual exercises.

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#### 4. Message from Adrienne Gordon and a Tribute to Ian Gordon by Keith Lander

Adrienne Gordon has sent the following message:

*Thank you to AIF members from myself and my family for all the cards, messages and expressions of sympathy that we received. It was also good to see so many of our Interchurch friends at both of the services we held for Ian. We are truly blessed to belong to such a loving family. I very much hope to get to the London meeting to thank them personally. Adrienne*

At Ian's memorial service Keith Lander was asked to share some of his reflections on Ian's ecumenical work and his tribute to Ian can be read below.

#### Ian Gordon 1940 – 2018



Ian Gordon was a committed Roman Catholic and an ecumenist -- a dedicated ecumenist. He worked tirelessly for Christian unity in various Churches Together groups in Bedford, Bedfordshire, Northampton, and in the Association of Interchurch Families (AIF).

We don't know exactly how Ian envisaged a united church but he was inspired by the words of Jesus as given in John 17:

"I pray for those who will believe in me through their message,  
that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.  
May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Ian's first ecumenical encounter was on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1962 at Nottingham University Motor Club where he met Adrienne, a practising Anglican, a member of the Church of England! They married on July 27<sup>th</sup> 1963, at the Catholic Church nearest to Adrienne's home in Devon. Ian asked permission to go with Adrienne to her Anglican Church. It was given on condition he did not take part in any of the services! Ian's dad had expected Adrienne to convert but she was not for turning! But to get permission (dispensation) to marry she had had to promise to bring the children up as Catholics. This was pre-2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council and the Catholic Church still had strict rules about what it required of non-Catholic spouses in so-called 'mixed marriages'. Ian thought the rules draconian. Fortunately, this promise is no longer required and other rules have since been relaxed, in part, due to the work of two-church couples like Ian & Adrienne.

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Ian and Adrienne decided that in bringing up the children they would teach them to know and love the traditions of both the Anglican and the Catholic Church. Juliet was baptised in the Catholic Church on the

Saturday and welcomed as an Anglican on the Sunday. That was in Crawley where others were beginning to engage in ecumenical activity but afterwards they moved to Leicestershire and things regressed. Andy was baptised RC but he did have 'mixed' godparents.

They then moved to Clophill in Bedfordshire and in 1976 Elizabeth was baptised in St Mary's parish church with the RC priest in attendance. Their vicar, Fr Philip Swindles had learned about an organisation called Interchurch Families from Keith & Pat Lander when he had been at All Saints LEP in Pin Green, Stevenage.

He moved to Clophill in 1980 and introduced Ian & Adrienne to AIF. That became a great source of comfort and support for them and in turn they helped to foster the Association by organising local meetings for the Herts and Beds group, as it became known.

When Keith & Pat came back to the area in 1981 they met Ian & Adrienne at an AIF family picnic which they had organised in Clophill and discovered they had found out about Interchurch Families from their former vicar, Fr Philip! Ian and Adrienne were now listed as 'local contacts' for the Association as well as convenors for meetings of the local group. They did this enthusiastically for a number of years and organised meetings at which to meet with the Bishop and other local ecumenists, as well as with new couples who wanted to get married but were also struggling with 'those rules'. (And when hymns were sung, Ian & Adrienne provided the musical accompaniment on their guitars.) They went on to found Clophill Christian Fellowship. This later became Churches Together in Clophill, and then just Christians Together, to which Ian, by now retired from teaching, was able to devote much of his time.

In 2001 Churches Together in England wanted to appoint a County Ecumenical Officer for Bedfordshire (as it does again today) and Ian & Adrienne applied for the job and got it. Bishop John Richardson, then chair of Bedford Ecumenical Committee, installed them jointly to the post and they became known as 'Gordon Squared' or 'The Heavenly Twins'. As committed ecumenists, Ian and Adrienne revelled in this work for over 6 years.

They also helped set up the organisation BELIEF in Bedford which trains lay people for church work and lays on important speakers on big ecumenical topics. Meantime, Ian had been appointed as a Trustee on the Northampton Diocese Ecumenical Commission which he served for 25 years until recently when his health began to fail him.

Ian Talbot Gordon, born 19 December 1940, died 6 December 2018. May he rest in Peace.

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