

Distributed April 2019

Dear Member

This AIF News Bulletin contains the following information and reports:

1. AIF Weekend 2019 - Conscience and Spiritual Conversations – BOOKING NOW OPEN!
2. Report of the AIF London Meeting by Antony and Janet Denman
3. A Request from Ruth Reardon
4. An Appreciation of Paul Snell by Liz Dwyer
5. Report of the Rudolstadt 50th Anniversary Conference of the German Association in March 2019 by Stephen Judd (attached as a separate document).

I have also received today information about a forthcoming Marriage Enrichment Event in Westminster on May 11th. As this may be of interest to some members I have attached a flyer with more information.

If you have any news or articles to share with members, please do continue to send them to me.

Please also continue to check the website www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk and our Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Interchurchfamilies/> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/interchurchfam> 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

'You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.' Pope Saint John Paul II, York, 1982



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. AIF Weekend 2019 - Conscience and Spiritual Conversations – BOOKING NOW OPEN!

Please find attached a booking form for the next AIF Weekend which will take place from 12 -13 October 2019 at The Hayes, Swanwick. Please send completed booking forms either by post or email to the office.

Last year the Conference of German Bishops issued guidelines indicating that, under certain conditions, eucharistic hospitality might be extended to the non-Catholic spouse in an interchurch marriage. At the heart of their document the bishops say that any decisions to share communion should be made by the interchurch spouses themselves informed by their consciences after a “spiritual conversation” in which they should be guided by a priest or pastor. They envisage such spiritual conversations following the guidance given in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. Discernment at this level is not something with which most lay people are likely to be familiar and so during the weekend we will therefore consider:

- How such a process of discernment might “work”
- The steps that someone might take, both in planning and in holding, that conversation.
- What the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are – and how they might help in the process of discernment.
- How else a “spiritual conversation” might proceed.

The weekend will also include bible study and, as always, opportunities for joining in worship as well as time for fellowship, sharing experiences and learning together. During the weekend we will be joined by:

- Fr Dominic Robinson SJ – who will lead our discussions on discernment
- Jenny Bond from Churches Together in England – who will lead our bible study
- Revd Dr Callan Slipper – National Ecumenical Officer for the Church of England

Would you like help with the cost?

We hope that as many members as possible will join us (including you). If the cost would prevent you from coming, please remember that help is available from a dedicated fund that has given over £2,000 in grants and loans in recent years. One recipient of a grant said:

"My heartfelt thanks for giving us the opportunity to attend the weekend. We got so much out of it – it was a big, greatly appreciated, spiritual refreshment."

If you think we might be able to help you too, please contact the fund administrators, Andrew & Helen Granger-Bevan (by 31 August) at andrew.granger-bevan@ntlworld.com or on 01273 779022. All requests will be treated in total confidence

'You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.' Pope Saint John Paul II, York, 1982



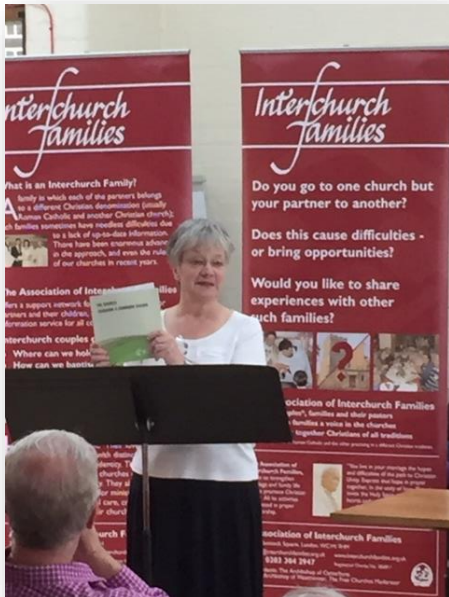
Association of Interchurch Families, 10 Aldersgate Street, EC1A 4HJ
info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk Tel: 020 3384 2947. www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk

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

2. Report of the AIF London Meeting by Antony and Janet Denman

On the 30th March over forty members of AIF met together for the Annual General Meeting followed by an inspiring talk and Free Church Communion service led by Rev. Susan Durber.



What is Church?

What defines a Church, and what distinguishes it from a Café. In a thoughtful, entertaining and challenging talk, Rev Dr Susan Durber asked us to think what a church is and what it is for. Susan is Minister at Taunton United Reformed Church, and is Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC), having served as a member of the Commission for some years. Her talk was based around “The Church: Towards a Common Mission” a booklet of 60 pages and 69 paragraphs developed by the Faith and Order Commission over three decades and published in 2013.

The booklet sought responses from Christian Denominations, of which 70 had been received so far, with the response from the Roman Catholic Church due shortly. The Faith and Order Commission has a membership from many denominations – Protestant, Orthodox, Evangelical, Coptic and Roman Catholic (since Vatican II) even though the Roman Catholic Church were only observers at WCC.

So, what is essential – do we need just 2 or 3 people and a bible? Should some be ordained? Should the church have sacraments? a common belief? a decision-making structure? should it be local, or a group of communities?

And what is church for? Is it there to be feeding the hungry? Or about providing a community for worship? Do you need above all to have a link with the apostles of the first century? do you need a clear sense of a common faith, a common mission? Is it faithful to tradition, and/or responsive to contemporary situations? “The Church: Towards a Common Mission” starts with mission – the mission of God to mend our brokenness and to give us life. And the God who has this great mission has created the church to be a *sign* and a *servant* of this mission. The church is all the people. The church is both a *human* and a *divine* reality. The church is God’s gift to the world and it is, in theological terms, **indestructible**, which gives us encouragement in the face of falling numbers in many parts of the world. The booklet encourages all of us to look at Christians in other churches and to ask – where do I see in them the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church? The church is both *local* and *universal*.

‘You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.’ Pope Saint John Paul II, York, 1982



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

The booklet has generated a number of responses from churches, ecumenical bodies and individuals. There have been a number of common themes in the formal replies – wanting more content about mission (for young people, serving the world, and transforming injustices), a disappointment that there was no specific guidance on knowing what degree of diversity between and within churches is legitimate, guidance on sexuality, little about the role of women, and or guidance on finding true authority in the church.

The Faith and Order Commission awaits further comments with interest and is currently working on other projects on Justice and Peace, and Moral Discernment, where Slavery is being considered as a historical case study in view of the support slavery received from many churches.

Susan noted at the start that we, as Interchurch Families, like her, care deeply about Church Unity, and feel the pain of its brokenness. We know that Ecumenism is not academic or a theoretical construct, but is real and important in our daily lives. Susan was very interested in how our concept of “double-belonging” affected our thoughts on “church” and ensured there was time for an extended and lively discussion.

To close the meeting, Susan presided over a non-conformist communion service, which included the gospel passage of the parable of prodigal son, which was linked in her sermon to Mother’s day and roles of Mothers and Fathers. Her sermon concluded *“My home is ... where Christ is - and this is the table where I am welcome, this is the table where I am prepared for life in God’s world, this is where I celebrate the love that is the source of all our lives. This is where God, having run to meet us, provides a feast. Let us not hesitate to accept the invitation and to find our place, together.”*

Further Reading

The texts of Susan Durber’s talk and sermon are available on the members section of the AIF website (***if you haven’t found this section yet, please go to www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk and complete the simple registration process***)

“The Church: Towards a Common Mission”; was published in March 2013 ISBN: 978-2-8254-1587-0

- Paperback available from Amazon.co.uk and Eden.co.uk
- PDF downloadable free from

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision> or from the AIF website.

CTBI have issued a study guide of “The Church: Towards a Common Mission” which can be downloaded free from <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Study-Guide-The-Church-Towards-a-Common-Vision.pdf>

A Number of Responses to “The Church: Towards a Common Mission” from Christian denominations are freely available on the web, including from the Methodist Church, Salvation Army and the Church of Scotland.

A previous report from the Faith and Order Commission “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”, published in 1982, is also available to download free from

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text>

‘You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.’ Pope Saint John Paul II, York, 1982



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

3. A Request from Ruth Reardon

Please Help!

The last AIF News Bulletin (19/1) included a request to 'tell your story' in the long-standing AIF tradition. Here I want to spell out the request and its purpose in greater detail (helped by a brief discussion we were able to have on this at the London meeting).

A spiritual conversation: In the 2018 Guidelines that the German Bishops set out for eucharistic sharing in interchurch families, they proposed a method to help couples to decide for themselves whether they have a real need to share communion, and whether the non-Catholic partner shares Catholic eucharistic faith. Couples are invited to seek a 'spiritual conversation' with their priest or someone else appointed to offer this pastoral care, to enable them to come to a decision which follows their own consciences as well as respecting the unity of the church. This conversation would be patterned on that of Jesus who walked and talked with two of his disciples on Easter Day on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and on the advice given by St Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*, when an important decision is to be taken. It is the couple who are to decide for themselves 'yes', or 'not now'. If the couple comes to an affirmative decision, this would be respected by the Catholic Church and it would be a joy for the bishops to welcome them to share communion in the eucharist.

Our experience: It occurs to me that between us we would have a considerable experience of 'spiritual conversations' – albeit much more informal than those proposed by the German bishops, and often initiated by ourselves rather than by bishops or priests. To share and reflect on this experience could be useful in preparation for the time when/if the German bishops' proposal comes back into the international spotlight. The method proposed has been discounted by critics as a lightweight approach which simply means rubber-stamping the emotional desires of interchurch couples, and not taking seriously the current stance of canon law. In fact the German bishops have taken this very seriously, while at the same time offering a truly pastoral approach. In the words of Ray Temmerman: 'Real "walking with" as a process of discernment, rather than a "one size fits all" approach, has got to be the way to go. It not only makes possible and practical the "exceptional" approach of canon law, it calls couples and church authorities to real adult decision-making, a sense of real involvement with each other, rather than a sense that one part of the Church is dictating to another part.'

Some questions: Please offer your experience if you can. Don't immediately think you haven't got anything relevant to say, because that's unlikely! Any format will do – just a few lines will help. You may want to recall just one conversation, or more. I don't only want the facts – whether or not you were allowed to receive communion, for example – but I'm trying to get at the quality of the conversations you may have had, expressed in your own words and in terms of your own personal experience. If I get responses I will write them up without identifying people or places, in the way we have done on other topics in the past. On the next page are some questions that might help as starters, but equally you may think of things which haven't occurred to me.

'You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.' Pope Saint John Paul II, York, 1982



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

- For us it has often been a case of ‘asking permission’, but have you ever had the sense of an exchange when you and the priest or minister were seeking together for God’s will in your particular situation?
- Have you ever had the sense of really being heard, that you were being helped to formulate your own stance on eucharistic sharing? (and perhaps not only by clergy, but by Marriage and Family Life ministers, interchurch couples, other lay people.)
- Have there been times when the clergy have taken the initiative, asked you questions about your experience in a way that has led on to a ‘spiritual conversation’?
- Have you ever been rung up by a bishop wanting a personal conversation with the Anglican or Free Church partner who has asked him for admission to communion?
- Has an Anglican/Free Church partner ever been helped in a positive way to express his/her eucharistic belief?
- Have you experienced a conversation which has helped you to understand the position of the Roman Catholic Church on eucharistic sharing in a deeper way, and your own motivations too?
- Has it ever been made explicit to you that it is your consciences, your decisions that are paramount factors in what is to be done?
- Have you been allowed to express your sorrow (as Jesus listened to the two disciples walking to Emmaus), and were the Scriptures opened to you in a way that helped you to see the relationship between suffering and resurrection? ‘Didn’t our hearts burn within us?’ said the disciples to one another; have you ever had that kind of heart-warming experience – maybe even when you least expected it?

I know we could produce lots of negative experiences, times when a conversation we tried to initiate turned into total disaster. (Have we always been tactful and realistic ourselves?) But I would prefer to concentrate on positive accounts, since I am trying to show that the German bishops’ proposal is practicable – that there has already been good practice around for quite some time, and that some of us have actually experienced it, and can bear our collective positive witness to it. (The German bishops do realise that not all clergy are prepared for initiating a spiritual conversation on such a delicate matter, and say that they themselves will take responsibility for a period of training.) It would be good to be able to express our joy for the very real pastoral understanding that we have received over the years.

If it’s too difficult to write things down, you could always ring up (01234 888992) or drop in if you are travelling north or south – Turvey is between the M1 and the A1. Thank you.

4. An Appreciation of Paul Snell by Liz Dwyer

Paul Snell 1937-2018

When Paul and Jo’ Snell joined our Sheffield AIF group in the 1980s they brought a new dimension to it. The family might be living in a Derbyshire village, but they had come from a different way of life. In 1967 Paul, a young doctor, was sent out by the Methodist Missionary Society to establish a hospital at Dabou in the Ivory Coast. It must have been a daunting prospect as basic building was not yet completed and the need was desperate. At times Paul was the only doctor and the queues for Monday morning clinics

‘You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.’ Pope Saint John Paul II, York, 1982



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

began on Friday evenings. The United Nation Association sent three nurses (who were also trained midwives) to support his work. One of these was Jo'. In the early days of establishing the hospital they faced innumerable challenges which demanded ingenuity and adaptation. Relatives slept on the floor; tiny babies in drawers in the office.

During the fifteen years that Paul was Medical Director, the hospital grew – serving thousands of patients, not just on site but through mobile clinics. More wards were opened and by 1982 there was an international team of medical staff.

Meanwhile Paul and Jo' had married and had three sons. In 1982 the family exchanged life in an African hospital compound for a Derbyshire village and the boys, whom Jo' had home schooled, had their first experience of school. Paul retrained in Public Health Medicine and became Director of Public Health for Sheffield, at a time of great challenge and development in this field.

So Paul and Jo' brought to our local AIF group the experience of having lived as an inter-church family in a very different context. Away from the UK they had not experienced some of the church difficulties the rest of us had. I asked Jo' whether, despite this, AIF had been helpful to them. She said "Yes," because they believed that AIF was "how Church should be".

When Paul retired the two of them committed themselves fully to the work of Assist, a Sheffield based charity which supports asylum seekers. Paul had an impassioned sense of justice, was tireless in his advocacy of the vulnerable and later became a trustee of the charity.

During the later years of his life he struggled with chronic pain and severe health problems. We had been friends for a long time but when my husband, Brian, was ill I saw at first hand the intelligence, experience and compassion which drove Paul, both in his larger responsibilities and in his dealing with individuals. Family life was vitally important to Paul and he and Jo' were a team. Their faith was ecumenical in every aspect. They enriched our AIF group and the lives of so many others. This was reflected in the diversity of people packing the village church last December to join his family in giving thanks for his life.

5. Report of the Rudolstadt 50th Anniversary Conference of the German Association in March 2019 by Stephen Judd (attached as a separate document).

'You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.' Pope Saint John Paul II, York, 1982



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