

THE STORY OF THE BCC

Notes by Colin Davey

Preface

'The Story of the BCC - follow the pilgrim road' was designed as a chart by Alan Dawkins with notes by Colin Davey. These provide some account of its origins and some indication of the ecumenical events in the life of the churches and of its sister-councils in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For the sake of space much has had to be omitted, but it is hoped that what is recorded here will help people to follow this stage of the ecumenical pilgrimage particularly during the years 1942 to 1990, and to be aware of the enormous variety of ecumenical work that has been undertaken during this period.

The Story of the BCC

Origins

- 1890s National Free Church Council established.
- 1916 Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, a more official and representative body, came into existence.
- 1939 Free Church Federal Council brought these two organisations together.
- 1910 The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference delegates 'gathered together from different nations and races and communions' came to realise 'their oneness in Christ' according to John R. Mott. Its Secretary was J. H. Oldham.
- 1912 The Conference of British Missionary Societies was established, and grew rapidly in strength and importance in the next three decades.
- 1920 The International Missionary Council linked national bodies together.
- 1911 The Interdenominational Social Service Council was founded. It undertook the British preparations, which included
- 1924 The Birmingham Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship, for
- 1925 The Stockholm Conference, whose Continuation Committee was reconstituted in
- 1930 as the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work.
Archbishop Nathan Soderblom of Uppsala, Sweden, Dean (later Bishop) George Bell, Bishop William Temple, Hugh Martin and C. E. Raven were leading figures in this movement, which included the
- 1937 Oxford Life and Work Conference on Church, Community and State.

- 1941 Malvern Conference on Social Questions, organised by the Industrial Christian Fellowship.
- 1914 World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches formed. Its British Section and the Christian Social Council together formed in
- 1939 a Commission of the Churches for International Friendship and Social Responsibility, with Archie Craig as its Secretary.
- 1917 onwards Councils of Christian Congregations were formed in Bolton, Manchester, St. Albans and elsewhere.
- 1920s A Committee for Mutual Understanding and Co-operation between Christian Communion of Wales was created.
- 1922 A United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communion in Ireland was formed.
- 1925 The first Scottish Churches Council was inaugurated.
- 1940s Religion and Life Weeks were held in Bristol, Bolton, Harrow (for Youth), Leeds (for school children) and elsewhere.
- 1927 The First World Conference on Faith and Order took place in Lausanne.
- 1933 The Friends of Reunion was formed.
- 1937 The Edinburgh Faith and Order Conference took place.
- 1938 A British Advisory Committee developed into a Council on the Christian Faith and Common Life, whose *Christian News-letter* edited by J. H. Oldham and Kathleen Bliss, came to exercise wide influence.
- 1935 The Abbe Paul Couturier of Lyon advocated a 'Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity' on the inclusive basis of prayer for 'the unity Christ wills by the means he wills. This placed on a sound basis earlier appeals and proposals for prayer for Christian Unity, including the Rev. Ignatius Spencer's 'Union of Prayer for Unity' (1840), Pope Leo XIII's 'Prayer Octave for Unity' in the context of Pentecost (1894), the Rev. Paul Wattson's 'Church Unity Octave' (1908) and the Faith and Order Movement's 'Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity' (1926).
- 1941 On Whitsunday the first United Service of International Christian Witness was held in Westminster Abbey.
- 1942 The British Council of Churches was created. A service was held in St. Paul's Cathedral at which Archbishop William Temple of Canterbury preached. He said: 'Today we inaugurate the British Council of Churches, the counterpart in our country of the World Council, combining in a single organisation the chief agencies of the interdenominational co-operation which has marked the last five years ... Our differences remain ... but we take our stand on the common faith of Christendom, faith in God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. The business sessions on 23rd and 24th September were held in Baptist Church House, Southampton Row.

1940's

1942 BCC began with sixteen member denominations and several inter-denominational organisations, including YMCA, YWCA, and SCM. Its Basis was the same as that agreed in 1938 for the proposed World Council of Churches: 'A fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour'; but 'with the understanding that any body which has hitherto been represented on the Commission (of the Churches for International Friendship and Social Responsibility) shall continue in membership of the Council, if so willing, even though it does not itself accept the basis'. This enabled the Society of Friends and the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches to be associated with the new body.

The CCIFSR's offices at 20 Balcombe Street, Dorset Square became the BCC's first headquarters. Its Secretary Archie C. Craig, became the BCC's first General Secretary with Rev. R. E. Burlingham as a colleague. Bomb damage necessitated a move to 56 Bloomsbury Street, the office of the SCM Press. The BCC's first departments were International Affairs, Social Questions, Youth and Evangelism.

1944 J. H. Oldham said 'the Council must preserve its church character, and not seek to exercise the greater freedom which belongs to a private body.'

1945 onwards Bishop George Bell led British Church involvement in Christian Reconstruction in Europe and its British Committee. By 1947 nearly a million pounds had been raised by the churches.

1946 J. H. Oldham chaired the commission which reported on 'The Era of Atomic Power: A Cambridge Conference on Evangelism took place; and a report on Christian witness in rural areas 'The Land, the People and the Churches' was issued. Archie Craig resigned to become Assistant Leader of the Iona Community. His 'right balance of caution and initiative' helped to establish the BCC as 'an official Council of the Churches, with which 126 local Councils of Churches were now linked. R. E. Burlingham became Acting General Secretary. Janet Lacey became Field Secretary in the Youth Department.

Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher suggested in a Cambridge University sermon that the Free Churches should take Episcopacy into their own systems, as a means towards establishing common sacraments and a commonly accepted ministry. This he saw as 'an easier step than those involved in a union of Churches; and, if achieved, it would immensely carry us forward towards full communion, without the fearful complexities and upheavals of a constitutional union:

1947 David Say, who had been General Secretary of the Church of England Youth Council, was appointed General Secretary of BCC aged 33.

1948 The World Council of Churches came into existence when representatives of 147 churches met at its First Assembly in Amsterdam. The BCC became an associated Council with the WCC.

The BCC gave increasing attention to African problems, including the adoption of apartheid as the official policy of the Nationalist Party, the new government in South Africa, the troubles surrounding Seretse Khama in what is now Botswana, and the creation of the Central African Federation

1949 The BCC's Ecumenical Refugee Committee and Christian Reconstruction in Europe were brought together in the Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service Department of the BCC. Janet Lacey (who became its secretary in 1952) described this as 'a dramatic moment' for the future of these enterprises.

1950's

- 1950 New BCC Headquarters formally opened 24 January 1950 at 39 Doughty Street.
- Council meetings began to be held regularly outside London - Edinburgh 1949, Cardiff 1950, Belfast 1952, Birmingham 1953 etc. - as well as at one or other of the denominational headquarters in London.
- The first Scottish Churches Council was replaced with a Scottish Churches Ecumenical Association to which individuals belonged, and a Scottish Churches Ecumenical Committee.
- 1951 The first British Conference of Christian Youth was held at Bangor, North Wales.
- 1952 The Third World Conference on Faith and Order took place in August in Lund, Sweden; its Report began with 'a word to the churches' which included what came to be known as the 'Lund Dictum': 'Should not our churches ask themselves... whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?'
- In the autumn a special service was held at St. Paul's Cathedral to mark the tenth anniversary of the BCC. In his sermon on that occasion Archbishop Fisher asked: 'Have not the Churches found in thought and practice that the unity they have is not disembodied at all, but is a unity within the Body of Christ? Are they not ready now to say that the Holy Catholic Church embraces all baptised persons, and that ... our divisions are within the Holy Catholic Church and not across its boundaries?'
- 1954 The first annual BCC Swanwick Conference took place at Whitsun. Its aim was to quicken the understanding and enthusiasm of local leaders; it was linked with world-wide preparations for the Second Assembly of the WCC at Evanston, Illinois. Bible Weeks were also held in co-operation with the British and Foreign Bible Society.
- 1955 The BCC moved to 10 Eaton Gate, with Edinburgh House, the home of the CBMS only four doors away.
- David Say became Rector of Hatfield (and a few years later Bishop of Rochester); he was succeeded as General Secretary by Kenneth Slack who had been Minister of St. James Presbyterian Church, Edgware, and for a few months Associate General Secretary.
- Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and of the Lutheran and Baptist Churches in Russia visited Britain.
- 1956 The second Youth Conference took place in Bristol.
- The Council of Churches for Wales was formed in succession to the Committee for Mutual Understanding and Co-operation between the Christian Communion of Wales.
- The artist Frank Salisbury handed over to BCC his house 'Sarum Chase, together with considerable funds and a large number of his paintings. This legacy was seen as the nucleus of what might be required for permanent BCC headquarters.
- 1957 The first annual Christian Aid Week was held; the Inter-Church Aid Department expanded rapidly through the 50s and 60s and because of the success of Christian Aid Weeks, changed its name to Christian Aid in 1964.
- 1958 The Social Responsibility Department's concerns included industrial questions; the report 'The Church and Industry' was largely the work of Miss Mollie Batten, Principal of William Temple College, Rugby.

1960's

- 1960 There were 300 local Councils of Churches by now, with which the BCC Faith and Order Secretary, Peter Bide, kept in touch.
- 1961 The third WCC Assembly took place in New Delhi, at which the integration of the International Missionary Council with the WCC took place.
- 1962 The report 'Human Reproduction' by the Advisory Group on Sex, Marriage and the Family, drew attention to some of the ethical issues arising from new biological and genetic discoveries. The third Youth Conference was held in Leicester, the secretary of the Youth Department being Nina Borelli.
- 1964 The progress of Anglican-Methodist conversations was slow; little was expected of Anglican-Presbyterian discussion. No real progress towards organic unity seemed to be occurring in Britain. In this context the BCC Nottingham Faith and Order Conference took place, and invited the BCC member churches 'to covenant together to work and pray for the inauguration of union, in appropriate groupings such as nations, by a date ... (which) ... we dare to hope should not be later than Easter Day 1980'.
- The Scottish Churches' Ecumenical Association and Committee were replaced by a re-constituted Scottish Churches Council, based at Scottish Churches' House, Dunblane (opened in 1961).
- A British Churches' Housing Trust was set up as a promotional and advisory body.
- The Lutheran Council of Great Britain joined the BCC and in
- 1965 the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Thyateira and Great Britain also joined. Roman Catholic observers were also invited to the Council, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and its Decree on Ecumenism.
- 1965 Kenneth Slack was appointed as Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Cheam (he later became Minister of the City Temple, Director of Christian Aid 1975-82, and Minister of Kensington United Reformed Church; he died in 1987). His vigorous leadership and his effectiveness as a writer and broadcaster ensured, as the Church Times put it, that he left the BCC 'an absolutely established feature of the ecclesiastical landscape'
- John Weller, Secretary of the Faith and Order Department, was appointed Acting General Secretary 1965-66.
- The report 'The Future of South Africa' was published.
- The Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission was set up.
- 1966 Bishop Kenneth Sansbury, Anglican Bishop of Singapore and Malaya, and earlier Warden of Lincoln Theological College and of St. Augustine's College, Canterbury, was appointed General Secretary.
- The Council of Churches for Wales issued 'The Call to Covenant'; a Committee on Covenanting was later formed.
- The Irish Council of Churches was formed, superseding the United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communions in Ireland.
- 1966-67 A scheme of group study 'The People Next Door' (PND) was promoted as a local follow-up to the Nottingham Faith and Order Conference.

- 1967 The Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, and of Scotland, agreed to set up a joint BCC/RC Working Group to study a number of theological issues as well as inter-church marriages. Roman Catholics began to join local Councils of Churches.
- The Multi-Lateral Church Conversation in Scotland was begun.
- The report 'Christians and the Common Market' was published and attracted considerable attention.
- 1968 The Irish Tri-partite conversations began.
- Throughout this period the National Councils of Churches grew in strength. No English Council of Churches was formed, but the BCC performed a double task for England and for Britain and Ireland; the former task was made easier through the appointment later of an Ecumenical Officer for England.
- Alan Brash succeeded Janet Lacey as Director of Christian Aid.
- The BCC Education Department issued a series of reports during this period on Religious Education in Schools (1966), on The Recruitment, Employment and Training of Teachers of Religious Education (1971), and on Religious Education and Integrated Studies (1971) as well as being concerned with student unrest and interfaith dialogue.
- The first Areas of Ecumenical Experiment were set up as proposed by the 1964 Nottingham Faith and Order Conference.
- A working party set up in 1965 'to consider how the spirituality of the member Churches might be studied with a view to preparing proposals for promoting the spiritual life' issued its report, drafted by Gordon Wakefield, on 'The Life of the Spirit Today.'
- The Churches Advisory Committee for Local Broadcasting was formed.
- 1969 The English Standing Conference on Covenanting produced its second interim report.
- The Council was deeply involved in the campaign 'Churches Action for World Development' which included an ecumenical conference at Swanwick in October and a National Sign-In on World Poverty in December, when over a million people asked their MPs to support a policy for more official aid and better trade conditions for developing countries.
- The 1969 Sharing of Church Buildings Act was passed by Parliament, making it possible for two or more churches to share consecrated buildings and so facilitating the development of local 'Union Churches.'
- 1970's
- 1970 The number of Local Councils of Churches reached 650; at least half had some association with Roman Catholics. But a survey 'Local Councils of Churches Today' (published in 1971) revealed that many are inactive, apart from annual events such as Christian Aid Week and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Many are uncertain of their role, and some, launched with enthusiasm, have now languished.
- Concern for overseas students and their accommodation was expressed in a special report 'Overseas Students and the Churches'.
- 1971 Following a consultation in Birmingham in 1969 and further discussion, the Community and Race Relations Unit was set up.

'Ecumenical Experiments - a Handbook' was published, covering such subjects as designation, shared ministry, shared worship, and the sharing of buildings.

Closer links with the Roman Catholic Church through the Joint BCC/RC Working Group led to a special report, which faced the problems resulting from marriages between members of the Roman Catholic and other churches 'The Joint Pastoral Care of Interchurch Marriages'.

1972 A Common Certificate of Christian Baptism was issued.

A Church Leaders Conference was held in Selly Oak.

The Anglican-Methodist Unity Proposals failed to get a sufficient majority in the Church of England General Synod.

The Congregational Union and the Presbyterian Church of England became the United Reformed Church (later joined by the Churches of Christ). At its inaugural service leaders of other churches pledged to share in the continuing search for a wider unity; this led the URC to issue an invitation in

1973 to 'Talks about Talks' from which emerged later the Churches' Unity Commission (1974) involving several churches in England: the URC, Church of England, Methodist Church, Baptist Union, Churches of Christ, Moravian Church, Congregational Federation, and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Ballymascanlon Irish Inter-Church meeting, bringing together the Irish Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, held its first meeting.

The Consultative Committee for Local Ecumenical Projects in England came into existence as an independent body with full Roman Catholic membership; the success of the experimental 'Areas of Ecumenical Experiment' was marked by their change of name to 'Local Ecumenical Projects'. At this time they were mostly in shared buildings, often in new towns or new housing areas.

Bishop Kenneth Sansbury retired. He left the Council, according to the Rev. Arthur MacArthur, 'with an image that is more prophetic than conservative and yet with an increased respect amongst the member churches'. Rev. Harry Morton was appointed as the new General Secretary. He had served as a presbyter in the Church of South India, as Scholarships Secretary of the WCC's Inter-Church Aid Department in Geneva, in the Methodist Church Overseas Division first as Secretary for East and Central Africa, latterly as its General Secretary, and as President of the Methodist Conference.

The Liverpool'73 Youth Conference took place, focussing on worship, mission, shared responsibility, and the value of diversity.

1974 The Taize Council of Youth took place, an international event in which young people from the British and Irish Churches took part. It brought together worship, spirituality, action and commitment.

'Adventures in Unity' was published, describing the life and work of a variety of Local Ecumenical Projects and other united ventures in the local church.

'Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe' by Trevor Beeson was published as 'a reliable survey worthy of close study, through which our understanding of our Christian brethren throughout Eastern Europe may be deepened and our fellowship in prayer with them strengthened'. It was based on reports prepared by a BCC Working Party which met from 1971 to 1974.

- 1975 Following a Consultation on the spiritual dimension of the ecumenical movement, common prayer and worship, the Standing Conference on Unity in Prayer was set up. It continued to prepare for use in Britain material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity based on drafts prepared by a joint WCC/RC group.
- The Church in Wales (Anglican), Presbyterian Church in Wales, Methodist Church, and United Reformed Church (later joined by several Baptist churches) inaugurated a Covenant for Union at Aberystwyth in January 1975. Since then the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales has produced a Holy Communion Service and 'Principles of Visible Unity in Wales, and has encouraged local ecumenical developments.
- The Churches' Consortium on Industrial Mission was formed and later published 'Guidelines on Industrial Mission' (1979 and 1982).
- A series of regular BCC/ICC meetings began in 1975 and have continued ever since to provide occasions for church leaders and others to share their concerns, griefs and joys at different stages in what Robin Boyd has called 'Christianity discredited or pilgrim's progress?'
- 1976 'Visible Unity: Ten Propositions' was published in January. These were eventually accepted as a basis for the preparation of a covenant in England between URC, Church of England, Methodists, Moravians, and Churches of Christ.
- The report 'The New Black Presence in Britain: A Christian Scrutiny' was received by the Assembly. A joint Working Party between white-led and black-led churches was later established (1977) and produced three reports: 'Coming Together in Christ' (1978), 'Building Together in Christ' (1978) and 'Learning in Partnership' (1980).
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- The report of the Churches Group for Ministry among Children 'The Child in the Church' was issued.
- A major BCC project 'Britain Today and Tomorrow, which began life as 'Christian Hope for our time, made a progress report to the Spring 1976 Assembly, which agreed that the autumn 1977 Assembly should receive its eleven Reports on different aspects of British Society, on the basis of which Trevor Beeson's book 'Britain Today and Tomorrow' was published in 1978 as an analysis 'of the main problems in Britain today, and to suggest possible ways forward for tomorrow'.
- 1977 Another Youth Conference 'Dayspring' was held at St. David's.
- The NIE (originally 'National Initiative in Evangelism') received the cautious support of the BCC Spring Assembly, and developed over the next few years into the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism, stimulating rather than organising local evangelism through County Support Groups, a Nottingham Assembly (1980), and a recognition of convergence - as distinct from consensus - on 'The Gospel we affirm together'.
- The Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths was set up.
- The Collaborative Ministry Group was formed.
- The Human Rights Forum was established.
- The BCC held public hearings on the development of Fast Breeder Reactors in the context of nuclear energy policy.

- 1978 Christian Aid moved to new offices in Brixton.
- The report 'Moving into Unity' was published. Five stages of growth in ecumenical development were now identified: from Competition, through Co-existence, to Co-operation, Commitment, and finally Communion.
- In Selly Oak what came to be called the 'Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership' was established.
- In England the Churches Council for Covenanting was created with the brief to draft a form of covenant within two years.
- A Consultation was held on 'Charismatic Renewal and the Church, which was mainly concerned with charismatic renewal *within* the churches.
- A report 'Political Change in Southern Africa: Britain's Responsibility' was issued.
- After a consultation on the subject in 1978, the Standing Committee on Theological Education was formed in 1979.
- One World Week began in Autumn 1978, sponsored by the Churches' Committee of the World Development Movement, and with the commendation of the BCC Assembly.
- After considerable discussion and negotiation CBMS was integrated into BCC as the Conference for World Mission. In 1977-78 BCC moved progressively from No. 10 Eaton Gate to No. 6, from which access was now made into Nos. 2 and 4 so as to provide headquarters for the enlarged BCC.
- 1980's
- 1980 Harry Morton retired as General Secretary. His 'eloquence, clarity and insight' helped people 'to recognise the challenge of the gospel in the life of our nations and churches. The BCC 'appreciated greatly the unifying force of a truly spiritual and pastoral leadership. He was succeeded by Dr. Philip Morgan, who had been General Secretary of the Churches of Christ until its union with the URC, a member and latterly Chairman of the Division of Ecumenical Affairs, and Co-Chairman also of the Selly Oak Centre for Black and White Christian partnership.
- The BCC Stewardship Committee issued its first report: 'Christian Stewardship in the 1980s.
- The BCC Working Party on Humanity and Sexuality, setup in 1977, issued its report 'God's Yes to Sexuality.
- The Division of Ecumenical Affairs issued 'A Guide to the present situation in the search for Church Unity in Britain' entitled 'Unity - Why not yet?' This was a reminder that at the Nottingham 1964 Faith and Order Conference, Easter Day 1980 had been set as the target date for unity in Britain.
- The Youth Unit produced 'Pocket Praise' a collection of hymns, prayers and readings for use by Youth Groups in worship.
- At an Open Forum convened by the joint Working Party between Black-led and White-led churches in October 1980 in Brixton, it was agreed that a Conference for Christian Partnership should be set up.
- 1981 The Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths published its 'Guidelines for Dialogue in Britain:
- Another Youth Conference 'Mannafest' was held at Lincoln.

The Youth Unit Working Party report 'Young People and the Church' was issued; its research component was further developed by Dr. Leslie Francis in his book 'Teenagers and the Church' (1984).

The Assembly agreed that a Working Party on the Community of Women and Men in the Church should be established.

The report of the BCC delegation to the Middle East in 1981 entitled 'Towards Understanding the Arab/Israeli Conflict: a Journey to the Middle East' was presented to the Assembly in Spring 1982.

During the visit of Pope John Paul II to Britain in May the BCC arranged for him to meet in Canterbury with a group of Church leaders. At Bellahouston Park in Glasgow the Pope addressed the 'larger community of believers in Christ' with the words: 'We are only pilgrims on this earth, making our way towards that heavenly Kingdom promised to us as God's children. For the future, can we not make that pilgrimage together hand-in-hand?'

The proposals for an English Covenant between the Methodists, Moravians, URC, and Church of England failed to gain a sufficient majority in the Church of England General Synod.

The WCC Faith and Order Commission's Lima report on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry was published, and began a process of discussion, response and reception by churches at national and local level.

1982 The first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission published its 'Final Report'. The 40th Anniversary of the BCC was celebrated in a crowded St. Paul's Cathedral. Music was provided by choirs of the New Testament Assembly, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the New University Singers. In his sermon, former BCC President Lord Michael Ramsey said the forty years of the BCC's existence had been tumultuous and frightening; yet self-conscious denominationalism had disappeared and we had learned the answers to the questions who is our Christian brother, and who in the world is our neighbour?

1983 'Returning the Papal visit' a delegation from the BCC and from the Roman Catholic churches in Britain visited Rome.

The 'Kaleidoscope' Youth Conference took place at Carmel in Cumbria, 'an event of fun, education and praise.

'A pattern for local ecumenism' was published, extending the concept of 'Local Ecumenical Projects' to cover a variety of patterns of shared buildings, ministry and mission, and including local covenants between two or more congregations in the same area; it also recommended the further development of County Sponsoring Bodies and County Ecumenical Councils.

The BCC Evangelism Committee (at first the Standing Committee on Evangelism) was established to carry forward the concerns of the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism within the structures of the BCC.

The Youth Unit's Equality and Gender Project was set up; it was in operation until 1986 and its report 'Lighting Candles' was published in 1989.

'Opportunities for Volunteers' was established with Government Funding to make grants to local church projects involving volunteers including unemployed people.

The BCC Peace Forum was set up. The BCC Assembly received the policy statement 'On Making Peace in a Nuclear World.

A BCC delegation visited China in December, returning the visit made by a Chinese delegation to Britain in 1982.

1984 In January 1984 Church Leaders in Britain were invited to a meeting with the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales at New Hall, Chelmsford. A church leaders retreat conference took place in April in Canterbury. At the BCC Spring Assembly a 'process of prayer, reflection and debate together centred on the nature and purpose of the Church in the light of its calling in and for the world', with its focus in a major conference, and with 'developments to provide an ecumenical instrument more broadly representative of the whole people of God in Britain and Ireland' was proposed. The collaboration of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales and in Scotland in this venture led to the Not Strangers but Pilgrims Inter-Church Process. A Church Leaders Meeting at Friends House in September asked a Working Group to produce more detailed proposals which were accepted in February 1985 at an Inter-Church Meeting at Lambeth Palace.

1985 was the International Year of Youth during which the Youth Unit was concerned with a number of events on the themes 'Peace, Participation and Development'.

In November 1985 there was a service at St. Peter's, Eaton Square to mark the inauguration of the Not Strangers but Pilgrims Inter-Church Process, at which representatives of some thirty churches lit candles as signs of their participation in this pilgrimage together.

1986 The Not Strangers but Pilgrims Inter-Church Process entered its first stage of consultation: at the local level about a million people and 57 radio stations took part in the Lent Course 'What on earth is the church for?'; 60-70,000 groups met; 100,000 questionnaires were completed; the results were published as 'Views from the Pews. At the national level the participating churches were asked the question 'how do you understand the nature and purpose of your church in relation to other Christian denominations and as we share in God's mission to the world?' Their answers were published as 'Reflections: how churches view their life and mission. In addition 'Observations on the Church from Britain and Abroad' were collected and published (early 1987).

In Wales the first Teulu Duw (God's Family) Festival took place. The Church Computer Project was established as a three-year programme.

The Christian Enquiry Agency in Scotland was set up.

A National Youth Conference took place at Liverpool as part of the Inter-Church Process and emphasised the importance of participation by young people in its structures and events.

The report on South Africa 'Whose Rubicon?' was issued.

Towards the 90's

1987 In the Spring three national conferences took place as part of the Inter-Church Process on the nature, purpose and unity of the Church: at Nottingham, for England; at Bangor for Wales; at St. Andrews for Scotland. Their reports formed the basis for the September Swanwick Conference, at which it was agreed to recommend moving 'from cooperation to commitment, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed and in common evangelism and service of the world. The principles were also established on the basis of which sketches for new ecumenical instruments for England, Scotland, Wales and for Britain and Ireland were drawn up.

Christian Aid produced, after wide consultation, its Statement of Commitment 'To Strengthen the Poor'.

The All Saints Declaration on Racism was issued.

The BCC adopted an Equal Opportunities Policy as an employer.

In the autumn five overseas Theological Educators visited colleges and centres of adult theological education in Britain. Their report 'Partners in Practice' was later published in 1989.

The Women's Resource Unit was established on a part-time basis with the backing of the Women's Inter-Church Consultative Committee, who had been asked to find a way forward after the 1984 BCC Autumn Assembly had been told that there were insufficient funds to carry out the recommendations of the Working Party on the Community of Women and Men for the continuance of its work.

'All Year Round, a quarterly collection of resource material for public worship, was first published.

'Stewards of God's House, a report by the BCC Stewardship Committee on Christian Stewardship and Church Buildings, was published.

The Division of International Affairs made concern with Central America one of its priorities and produced an information and study pack 'Central America: a Cause for Christian Concern.

In November the BCC and Christian Aid moved from Eaton Gate and Brixton respectively to new headquarters at Inter-Church House, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL.

1988 A second nationwide Lent Course 'Who on Earth Are You?' was sponsored by the Inter-Church Process.

were later revised in the light of their discussion in the churches' synods and assemblies and elsewhere.

The Christian Enquiry Agency in England was set up.

'Christian Initiation and Church membership, the Report of the BCC Working Party on the theology and practice of Christian initiation and church membership set up in 1984, was published.

'British and Irish churches respond to BEM, an analysis of their responses and their implications set in the context of the worldwide WCC Faith and Order Commission's programme, was published.

The Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe held a Youth Gathering at Bath, Avon, on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

1989 'The next steps for Churches together in pilgrimage, including definitive proposals for ecumenical instruments' in England, Scotland, Wales, and Britain and Ireland were published in January. In September it was decided that in view of the decisive 'yes' given to these by the great majority of Synods, Assemblies and Conferences, new ecumenical bodies should be inaugurated to succeed the present ones.

Significant losses are the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Baptist Union of Scotland. For the first time, however, Roman Catholics in England and Wales and in Scotland will be full members (with the RC Church in Ireland as an Observer) together with churches in the Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Holiness, Lutheran, Methodist, Moravian, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Reformed traditions.

In May members of British and Irish churches took part in the Basel Assembly 'Justice and Peace embrace each other' sponsored by the Conference of European Churches and the European Catholic Bishops Conference.

'Spectrum; an Inter-Church Youth Work training scheme was produced by the English Churches Youth Service.

The BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, which was set up in 1983, published its Report and a Study Guide based on six issues contained in it, with the title 'The Forgotten Trinity'

The Ecumenical Youth Council of Europe Secretariat moved from Budapest to Belfast, with the support of churches in Britain and Ireland.

1990 In February The Southern Africa Coalition organised a Mass Lobby of Parliament.

The Division of International Affairs issued reports on the visit of a delegation to Poland entitled 'Poland on the move' and on the 'Arms Trade'. It also gave continued support to the independence process in Namibia, and co-operated with the Division of Community Affairs in publishing a report entitled 'An Open House? The European Community - looking to 1992'.

In Lent 1990 a third nationwide Lent Course was sponsored by the Inter-Church Process for local ecumenical groups to consider a number of 'Turning Points' including the way forward for further growth together locally. This opened the way for local and regional celebrations at Pentecost of the next stage of the Ecumenical journey, including the second Teulu Duw (God's Family) Festival in Wales.

Commissioning Committees worked to implement the agreed proposals for the new ecumenical instruments whose inauguration dates and venues are as follows:

September 1st:

CTE - Churches Together in England: London
CYTUN - Churches Together in Wales: Aberystwyth
ACTS - Action of Churches Together in Scotland: Dunblane

September 8th:

CCBI - Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland: Liverpool

The ecumenical concerns of the British Council of Churches, Council of Churches for Wales, and Scottish Council of Churches are being handed over to their successor bodies, whose tasks will be to enable the churches to move 'from ecumenism as an extra, which absorbs energy, to ecumenism as a dimension of all that we do, which releases energy through the sharing of resources'.

The Story of the BCC is set out in a chart designed by Alan Dawkins and in these notes by Colin Davey which accompany it. Together they portray visually and verbally the main events in the life of the British Council of Churches between 1940 and 1990.



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The British Council of Churches Inter-Church House
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