

Issue 4
July 2024

Ecumenical Update



Together in Christ, Bound by Love

The ecumenical update for Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT)

Welcome to the quarterly ecumenical update for Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT). Here you will find general information on ecumenism so that together we can deepen our understanding of Christian unity. It also includes links to and details of ecumenical activity across our county, as well as what is happening nationally through Churches Together in England (CTE) and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). For further help or support around Christian unity please do not hesitate to contact me [County Ecumenical Officer](#).

County Ecumenical Officer Update - Dr Ian Watson

It has been a busy and productive time since the last update:



As County Ecumenical Officer (CEO) I act on behalf of NWCT and provide the link with Churches Together in England (CTE) to support ecumenism across Norfolk and Waveney.

Please do get in touch to tell us about your local ecumenical initiatives, we can then offer our prayers in fellowship and love.

Email: [County Ecumenical Officer](#)

1. The senior Church leaders of NWCT have agreed a new declaration of commitment for Christian Unity. I've attached it at the end of the update but it can also be found by clicking: [Together in Christ, Bound by Love, Serving as One](#). They will publicly commit to it on Christ the King, 24th November 2024 at 3.30pm, in the Anglican Cathedral Norwich. The sermon for the service will be given by the General Secretary of Churches Together in England, Bishop Mike Royal. This will be followed by a drink's reception for sharing and fellowship.
2. The new convenor for NWCT is Liz Hoffbauer (Quaker) who takes over from Rev Canon Dr Julian Pursehouse (Methodist). She will undertake the role for the next two years. We thank Julian for his service as he moves to pastures new in West Yorkshire. His replacement on NWCT is Rev Helen Hollands.
3. The Church leaders agreed final details for their 4-day pilgrimage to Rome in January 2025.
4. The Church leaders issued a joint statement on the General Election.

As County Ecumenical Officer, my priority continues to be establishing effective communication arrangements for NWCT. The new website is going well. It is a partner site of Network Norfolk – the premier Christian news service for Norfolk. To date over 50 articles of Christian and ecumenical interest has been published. Since going live earlier in the year there have been over 50,000 visits to the site. This is encouraging but we only have 90 people registered to receive the regular NWCT Enews email (which only ever includes four articles each circulation). It would be great to have more people registered, so, please circulate it among your own networks

and if anyone wants to receive it in future, they can [email me](#) or [Network Norfolk](#). The NWCT website can be found [here](#).

The senior Church leaders have agreed to the following core annual activities for their participation in NWCT. Recognising the wider commitments to their own denominations, these represent the minimum they will do together each year. They may, of course, decide to do more as ecumenical opportunities or need arise:

1. To meet together for prayer, friendship, study and ecumenical business twice a year (one meeting of which may involve a pilgrimage as in January 2025)
2. To hold one public ecumenical service of commitment and thanksgiving on the day of Christ the King. This year it is in the Anglican Norwich Cathedral. In 2025 it is in the Catholic Norwich Cathedral.
3. To publish a senior Church leaders opinion piece on Christian unity every quarter.
4. For NWCT to continue the chain of prayer in Norwich as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.
5. For NWCT to organise two annual lectures on ecumenism and Christian Unity a year. One to be held in Norwich the other elsewhere in the county (for 2025 I hope this will be in Great Yarmouth).

I've continued to meet many wonderful and inspiring Christians across Norfolk and Waveney. On a personal front I am very grateful for the warm welcome I have received wherever I have gone. It is such a blessing to learn more about the different Christian traditions that represent the Body of Christ in our great county. It is a joy to experience and see firsthand the openness to worship and walk together in Christ across Norfolk and Waveney. I know maintaining these efforts can sometimes feel like hard work for those involved, and no doubt resilience and patience are required, but it is clear to anyone who can see that the Spirit is at work in our local Churches Together groups. My message to you all from NWCT is thank you for your efforts and, most importantly, keep going!

As I reported in the last ecumenical update, in Norfolk and Waveney we have 4 out of the 7 Denominational Ecumenical Officer (DEO) posts vacant: Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Salvation Army. I am hopeful these will be filled over the coming months. If, however, anyone is interested in undertaking the role please express interest to your own Church Leader. You will learn a lot, meet many wonderful and inspiring Christians. Experience is not essential, and you would be providing a valuable service to your own denomination.

For this update I want to bring to your attention two helpful organisations that make available valuable resources for all Christians. The first I want to flag came to mind after I watched a recent debate online between Richard Dawkins, one of the so called four horsemen of the New Atheist movement (the others being Sam Harris, the late Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett who also passed away earlier this year), with their former high profile atheist acolyte Ayaan Hirsi Ali, herself, once regarded as the fifth Horseman of the New Atheist movement. Ayaan has announced that she

is now a Christian convert which, as you can imagine, is seen as a shocking blow to the New Atheist movement.

I find any conversion to Christ a joyous event. It is certainly true that Ayaan's life and personal testimony is very moving and powerful. The video of the discussion can be found [here](#).

Ayaan is a critic of Islam and advocate for the rights and self-determination of Muslim women, opposing forced marriage, honour killing, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. At the age of five, following local traditions in Somalia, she underwent female genital mutilation organised by her grandmother. Her father - a scholar, intellectual, and a devout Muslim - was against the procedure but could not stop it from happening because he was imprisoned by the Communist government of Somalia at the time. Under the control of the Muslim Brotherhood, her family moved across various countries in Africa and the Middle East and, at 23, she received political asylum in the Netherlands, gaining Dutch citizenship five years later. In her early 30s, Ayaan renounced the Islamic faith of her childhood, began identifying as an atheist, and became involved in Dutch centre-right politics.

Ayaan rightly has significant concerns against radical Islamists. I think she has a point when it comes to the more radical branches of Islam who advocate death for apostates, seek to impose Sharia law, suppress the rights of women, and have carried out the most appalling acts of terrorism in recent times; not least in the murder of 5,000 men (that included crucifixion, beheadings and shootings), rapes and women sold into sex slavery in Sinjar Northern Iraq by ISIS in 2014.

Saying that, part of her conversion to Christianity is that she believes we are in a fight for civilisation, and it is only Christianity (for her certainly not atheism or modern secular society) that can oppose Islam. Whilst sympathising with that view, at least up to a point, the danger of Ayaan's rhetoric is that of generalising the concern and not discerning the highly diverse nature of our Muslim brothers and sisters; the majority of whom are peace loving and wish to live side by side with other faiths. I deeply empathise with Ayaan, but I think any discussion between Christians and Muslims has to be one that is fully informed by credible sources.

From a Christian perspective one of the best and most accessible organisations that provide excellent resources is the Oxford Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies (CMCS). They are an independent Christian-based academic centre where Christians and Muslims come together to learn from and about one another, and our respective faiths in the context of living relationships. Their website is located [here](#).

CMCS produces a series of what they call *Hikmah* Study Guides. '*Hikmah*' is an Arabic word for wisdom. *Hikmah* Study Guides are an accessible way to develop an informed understanding of complex and potentially controversial topics which Muslims and Christian encounter together. Each guide is written with input from both Christian and Muslim scholars and is intended to be non-partisan, whilst not ignoring difficult or controversial issues and histories.

The guides can be read by both specialists and non-specialists in the field and can also be used as conversation starters for small groups. There will no doubt be Christians and Muslims who disagree with some points, or find the guides less than comprehensive, since no short work of these lengths can cover all the complexities of such a topic. Recognising this, however, each guide suggests additional reading for those who want to study further.

Anyhow, if like me, you want to reflect on and think more deeply about the relationship between Muslims and Christians, but from a highly regarded and trusted Christian standpoint, then I highly recommend you check of the study guides which can be located [here](#).

The second organisation I want to flag came to my attention after listening to the Radio 4 religious programme *Heart and Soul*. The episode was called ‘The Last Christians in Gaza’. It was about George Antone who is a member of the only Roman Catholic Church in Gaza, part of a dwindling Christian community, whose roots in this area go back to the 4th century.

When war broke out in October 2023, he was convinced that staying in Gaza City was the right option for safety but also to continue bearing witness to Jesus in this part of the world. He and his fellow Christians believed that the Church would be lost forever if they left. George’s family was the first to move into the compound of the Holy Family Church where he helped lead the parish through the next months as they suffered deaths of loved ones, near starvation and destruction of their homes. Throughout it all, he kept in contact with the BBC. Through the messages, a picture was built up of a community who kept going through prayer, determination and, inspiringly, daily contact from Pope Francis.

I found the story very moving. It got me thinking about the very small numbers of Christians who now live and practice their faith in the Holy Land. Amazingly, when checking my emails straight after the programme, in my NWCT inbox was a message from Caroline Ward, who works for the charity *Friends of the Holy land*. The charity works with Churches Together groups across the UK on a number of initiatives. Their website can be found [here](#).

They are an ecumenical non-political Christian Charity. As Christians their vocation is to seek justice and dignity for all. They are sustained by the knowledge that God is with us, revealing to us practical ways of living together. They work to support the lives and witness of Christians living in the Holy Land through prayer and practical projects, recognising that their presence in the land where Jesus once walked is an important witness to all Christians.

I think their work deserves to be supported. For example, did you know that just 100 years ago, Christians made up roughly 29% of the overall population of the Holy Land. Today they account for less than 2% in Israel and Jordan, and less than 1% in the West Bank. If nothing is done, by the next generation it is plausible that there will

be no local practising Christian communities left in the Land where Jesus walked; no local Christian communities worshipping in the Holy Sites. I don't know about you but I find this thought shocking.

Since October 2023, after Hamas inflicted the terror atrocities on innocent Israelis, in Israel's response to defend themselves, I think we can all agree that life for Gazans has become unbearable. Out of a population of over 2 million in Gaza (hard to believe that number when Gaza could fit into the district of North Norfolk) the number of Christians before the war was just over 1000, now there are around 800 remaining who are living in 2 churches (Catholic and Orthodox). Sadly, like so many of the population, Christians in these two churches have lost their lives either due to bombings, shootings, injuries sustained, or from lack of access to medication and treatments for other health conditions.

Anyhow, I will not go on about the human tragedy of Gaza as this is well publicised and documented elsewhere. Hopefully, many of you will have heard about *Friends of the Holy Land* and its charitable works. For those interested, Father Mamdouh Abu Sada, Director of the School of Joy in the Holy Land, will be at the New Dawn event at Walsingham from 5th – 9th August 2024. If you are in this area of North Norfolk why not go along to meet him and to support the *Friends of the Holy Land*.

The Leaders of Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT)

Opinion Piece by Rt Rev Peter Collins (Catholic Bishop of East Anglia)

Ecumenism is not about structures. It is about fostering and nurturing relationships to build trust and mutual understanding.

An important aspect of receptive ecumenism is that we learn more about each other's traditions so that we can better appreciate and share our different gifts. After all, ecumenism, at least as understood by most people, is about unity not uniformity. In this issue of the update the opinion piece is from Bishop Peter who also has a significant role on the [International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission](#).

IARCCUM is the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, a joint commission of the Anglican Communion and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

In Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT) we are lucky to have such a strong commitment between the seven senior Church leaders for Christian Unity. The experience and knowledge that Bishop Peter gains from his involvement with IARCCUM and shares in fellowship with his colleagues in NWCT is a blessing. Here Bishop Peter reflects on a Christian Unity summit in Rome and Canterbury held earlier this year.

I was recently appointed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to become a member of the [International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission](#) (IARCCUM). 25 Catholic bishops and 25 Anglican bishops from across the world gathered in Rome to be commissioned jointly by Pope

[Francis](#) and [Archbishop Justin Welby](#) of Canterbury on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, the conclusion of the Octave of Prayer for the Unity of Christians.

The Catholic and Anglican bishops were paired from each nation, I being united with Bishop Stephen Race of Beverley who was representing the Church of England. We assembled in Rome on Monday January 22 and transferred the conference to Canterbury on Friday January 26, concluding our deliberations on Monday January 29.

Article taken from IARCCUM

15 Feb. 2024:

IARCCUM.ORG



Bishop Peter Collins, Roman Catholic bishop of East Anglia (right) and Bishop Stephen Race, Anglican bishop of Beverley, reading an extract from the address of St. Gregory the Great sending St. Augustine on his mission to the Angles. The bishops were participating in Morning Prayer at San Gregoria al Celio, where St. Gregory commissioned St. Augustine in 596 AD (26 Jan. 2024). Photo: Neil Turner/IARCCUM

The experience was intense, enlightening and fruitful. Each pairing was charged with sharing their national experience of ecumenical dialogue and cooperation. This sharing proved to be a most powerful experience.

We received first hand witness regarding the effects of warfare in Sudan, South Sudan and Israel/Gaza. Accounts were given of the particular challenges faced by the Christian communities in Pakistan, Myanmar and China. The devastating impact of climatic changes were also addressed through presentations from Brazil and Polynesia/Micronesia. The universal challenges of deepening secularism on every continent were discussed in some detail.

Whatever divides the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion remains less than what unites us. The clear guiding principle of the conference and the guiding

principle for all shared action is that we should undertake whatever we can together, except where there is a clear point of division that would preclude such an approach.

Every stage and element of the gatherings in Rome and Canterbury held particular significance. For only the second time in history was Anglican Choral Evensong celebrated in St Peter's Basilica. Archbishop Justin celebrated the Anglican Eucharist in the Church of St Bartolomeo all'Isola where the Sanctuary of the New Martyrs is housed. Our visit to this Sanctuary left a deep impression upon us all, for we saw displayed a stunning representation of the sacrifice of so many Catholics, Anglicans and other Christians from across the expanse of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The formal commissioning of IARCCUM members took place on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. Pope Francis presided at Solemn Vespers in the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, accompanied by the Archbishop of Canterbury and in the presence of many members of the College of Cardinals and Prelates from many of the Eastern Rites and the Orthodox Churches. Each pairing of bishops were greeted and blessed by Pope and Anglican Primate. The Roman element of the conference concluded with us gathering for Morning Prayer at the Church of St Gregorio al Celio, the place where Pope St Gregory the Great commissioned St Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, to undertake the great mission to the nation of Angles in this island of ours. Bishop Stephen and I were charged with the privilege of reading an extract from the address delivered by Pope Gregory the Great.

Our arrival in Canterbury began with an evocative Candlelit Tour of the Cathedral. Standing on the spot where St Thomas of Canterbury was martyred obviously left a deep impression. We attended the Anglican Eucharist at the Cathedral on Sunday morning and Choral Evensong in the afternoon, the day and the conference concluding with a formal reception and dinner at the Old Palace, the official residence of the Archbishop.

The final agreed statement that was crafted at the conclusion of our deliberations outlines a clear intent for the future. I ask you all to pray for the sustenance of a shared Christian witness in the midst of an increasingly secular environment, the development of a serious and honest dialogue within the Christian family and the enhancement of cooperation between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion – internationally, nationally and locally.

Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP)



For this update we hear from Tracy Mayne, the administrator of **Cliff Park Community Church, Gorleston**, one of Norfolk's most successful and well-established LEPs.

We are a Local Ecumenical Project (LEP) of Anglicans and Baptists working together under our vision statement of "To live and to give the Good News."

Cliff Park Community Church, or CPCC as it is more commonly referred to, is a relatively new church. It began life on December 9, 1999, but its beginnings go way back to the 1950's.

As the Cliff Park area of Gorleston grew both St. Andrew's Parish Church and Gorleston Baptist Church, unbeknown to each other, had set their sights on developing work in the Cliff Park area.

Fast forward to the nineties and an experimental service, at the then Cliff Park Middle School, was held on Easter Sunday 1997 after the Rev. Paddy McGlinchey (St. Andrew's assistant minister) was approached by the then Baptist Minister Richard Hughes, and the idea of the two churches planting a church together was born. Members from both churches formed a core group who met, prayed and planned together and the rest you can say is history.

Being so close to the James Paget Hospital, we draw many Christians from the medical community resulting in a very multi-ethnic congregation with many nationalities worshipping together each week, including people from Nigeria, Kenya, Italy, Ghana, Poland, South Africa, Thailand, Philippines, to name just a few.

More recently in January 2024 we moved premises, although only next door to the senior school, Cliff Park Ormiston Academy. As a church, that rents a hall in a school, we have had to adapt and be creative in how we "do" services and often work with the other local churches in Gorleston.

Easter is a very good example of how well we work together with our Christian brother and sisters in the area.

Holy week saw us combining with St Mary Magdalene in Gorleston for the short daily evening service which contained a reflection. Our minister Rev Derek McClean and Rev Matthew Price (StMM) shared the leading of the services and we had various members of our churches involved in giving the reflection.

Each year on Good Friday we hold a walk of witness in Gorleston followed by a reflective service. A different church in Gorleston each year organises the walk and service. This year we started the walk at St Andrews church and finished with a service at Gorleston Baptist Church.

Living where we do, next to the sea and close to the most easterly point in Britain, a “Gorleston and Bradwell Churches Together Communion Service” at sunrise on the beach on Easter Sunday is an obvious choice.



Although 2024 saw British Summer Time starting the night before, so that meant a very early start. Again, the churches take it in turns in leading the service, this year it was CPCC’s turn, but all churches were involved in the service with worship led by David from StMM, prayers led by Shaula from St Andrew’s and the final prayer and blessing given by Mike from 6 Baptist Church.

The service was followed by bacon rolls and refreshments back at the St Mary Magdalene Café, very welcome after an early start and fuelled us ready to go back to our own churches for our morning services, which for us was an All-Age Service with holy communion at 10.30am back in our familiar surroundings at the school.



Local Churches Together Groups

Churches Together in Fakenham and District

Here Moira Morley Secretary of Churches Together in Fakenham and District says something of their group and activities. The group are doing a great job and I ask you to pray for them and their ongoing success.



ST ANTHONY OF PADUA
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

FAKENHAM BAPTIST
COMMUNITY CHURCH

SCULTHORPE AND FAKENHAM
METHODIST CHURCH

ST PETER AND ST PAUL PARISH
CHURCH

THE SALVATION ARMY

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION,
GT. WALSINGHAM

HOLY TRINITY HEMPTON

We were set up in 2009 with a formal Constitution and very active Moderators (as we call the Chair) and support officers in the early years. The former change every 2 to 3 years and alternate between clergy and lay members. Before Covid struck, the clergy met informally over a 'power breakfast' in a local hostelry once a month and they found this a very supportive and precious time. A Forum, with no more than 3 members from each church, met 2 to 3 times a year to suggest and organise joint events.

Covid changed all that, but a few faithful members soldiered on, and we have come to a new flowering of support and enthusiasm, with a regular programme of joint events.

Every church leads one daily meeting during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, during which we have a larger joint service for all of us, usually in the Roman Catholic church. This year, during Lent, we had a weekly study of each others' denominations which brought us together in love and openness as we examined why we worship the way we do in our various churches.

At Easter time, we join in each others' activities where we can, especially the Good Friday Walk of Witness to our Market Place for a short service, returning to the Salvation Army Hall for hot cross buns! Last year and again this year, we organise a Pentecost Picnic in the gardens adjoining the Parish Church, bringing our own picnics, playing games and culminating in a time of prayer and song.

June sees us holding our AGM and we have recently resumed the practice of enjoying outside speakers on various Christian topics. This year, our Rural Dean, Father Clive Wylie, will be talking on the subject of St Columba and how he has shaped our Christian lives. We have also much enjoyed Gospel Concerts in the autumn, given by our then Methodist Minister and his wife.

All churches are involved in the Town Remembrance services in some way and recently we have taken to singing carols on a Thursday before Christmas (Fakenham's Market Day) round the Baptist Community Church's gazebo.

So, the year comes round full circle, and we find in Fakenham that support for our respective churches is growing, for which we praise God and are truly thankful.



Churches Together in Kings Lynn

The following information is taken from May's newsletter published by Peter Coates.

The AGM for Churches Together in King's Lynn will be held at the Cornerstone Baptist Church on Wednesday 18th September at 7pm. Church projects will be displayed on stands and members of the audience can look at the stalls during breaks in the main the meeting.

Colleagues will be interested to note that Andrew Frere-Smith finished work as a frontline Imagine Norfolk Together community worker in King's Lynn on 28th June. Imagine Norfolk Together is a joint venture between the Church Urban Fund and the Anglican Diocese of Norwich. It seeks to support the work of local Christians in their community as they develop and deliver social action initiatives. There website is [here](#).

Photo: courtesy of Imagine Norfolk Together, Andrew Frere-Smith



The job was initially frustrating but when King's Lynn was found to be the 6th worst town in the UK for homelessness Andrew got involved and the Night Shelter was created. Andrew then worked with the Council developing the Men's Shed. He subsequently became treasurer of the CAP Debt Centre and has recently set up a Food Hub. This was funded by the Norfolk Community Foundation. The official opening of North Lynn Food Hub at 4 Walpole Road, PE30 2DZ will be on Wednesday 19th June at 11 am, The Food Hub now has 130 members with financial support from the County Council.

At the recent executive meeting, Andrew was given a huge 'thank you' for all the great work which he has done over the past 8 years.

Over 45 people gathered at Cornerstone King's Lynn Baptist Church on Saturday January 13th for the Peace and Justice Forum. The free event was open to anyone interested in issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

During a packed programme, leaders from 8 different church traditions and delegates from a number of local charities and groups had the opportunity to engage with challenging questions and to reflect on how together we can affect action to make a real difference in King's Lynn and surrounds. Lively and engaging discussions were had as well as a fantastic opportunity to network with other churches and groups in the pop-up resource centre.

The forum was presented by Rev Steve Tinning, the Baptist Union's Public Issues Enabler. Steve divides his working week between the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) and the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

The day concluded with a conversation between Rev Steve and Andrew Frere-Smith.

Next year's forum will be held at Gaywood Church Rooms on January 18.

News from Churches Together (CTE) in England



New Presidency Appointment

CTE has six Presidents who each sign a **Covenant which describes their commitment** to each other and to the churches in England. They meet regularly and liaise on a wide variety of issues of common interest and concern. Their meetings are facilitated by Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary of CTE.

The Fourth Presidency Group of Member Churches have nominated Bishop Paulina Hławiczka-Trotman to succeed Dr Anna Krauss as their President for Churches Together in England.

Bishop Paulina is the head of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain. She will serve as a CTE President for the remainder of the term of the Council of Lutheran Churches.



Photo: Courtesy of CTE, Bishop Mike with Bishop Paulina

CTE General Secretary, Bishop Mike Royal, said: “Churches Together in England is delighted at the appointment of Bishop Paulina Hławiczka-Trotman as a CTE President by the Fourth Presidency Group. Bishop Paulina has a proven track record of ecumenical engagement and an unwavering commitment to CTE’s Racial Justice Working Group. As the first female Polish Bishop in the UK, she is a trailblazer. We are excited about the ongoing journey with our Lutheran sisters and brothers”

Bishop Paulina Hławiczka-Trotman said: “I’m honoured to have been appointed as the CTE President representing the Fourth Presidency Group, to serve God and His church across the ecumenical family. I look forward to this challenge and the opportunities it promises, particularly at a critical time in our history in Britain and beyond. Thank you for your confidence expressed in this call to mission and ministry. It is with humility and joy that I come to the task together with you!”

The Fourth President is nominated by the Church of Scotland (Presbytery of England), the Council of Lutheran Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, the Synod of German-Speaking Lutheran, Reformed, and United Congregations in Great Britain (Evangelische Synode Deutscher Sprache in Großbritannien) and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers in Britain).

Details of the five other presidents can be found [here](#).

New National Methodist Ecumenical Officer

Rev Steven Cooper introduces himself in his new role and shares his experience of more than a quarter of a century of ecumenical work.

I’m delighted to take up the role of Connexional Ecumenical Officer (i.e. National Ecumenical Officer) for the Methodist Church in Britain. I am a presbyter, ordained in 2016, but have been enthusiastically involved in the life of the Church ecumenically for at least 25 years.

Photo: courtesy of CTE, Rev Steven Cooper



Having grown up with a wholly Methodist experience of Christian faith, my heart was set on fire by a broader perspective on what the Church is while at university in Cambridge, when I became extensively involved in sharing in life with Christians of diverse traditions and was deeply enriched through this experience. During those days, I helped to re-craft the constitution of the then Student Christian Council in the university, creating what became known as Christians in Unity in Cambridge.

Since then, I went on to work for nine similarly enriching years inside a different Christian tradition to my own—that of the Anglican Communion—first in the Education Division of the Archbishops’ Council of the Church of England, and latterly for over five years at Lambeth Palace as assistant to the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Principal Secretary for International, Ecumenical and Anglican Communion Affairs.

In 2012, I married Ruth (herself a Roman Catholic), and in the same year entered training for presbyteral ministry at Wesley House, Cambridge—part of the profoundly ecumenical Cambridge Theological Federation. As a presbyter, I have served in a variety of ecumenical contexts, first as minister for two LEPs (one URC-Methodist, one Anglican-Methodist) in North Hertfordshire; and most recently as Minister of Wesley’s Chapel & Leysian Mission (the ‘mother church’ of worldwide Methodism)—itself in a lively informal partnership with its ecumenical neighbours. I have also led regular visits of young adults to Taizé.

I served as Chair of Churches Together in Stevenage, and as the Methodist Denominational Ecumenical Officer for Hertfordshire. I’ve also long been involved in the governance life of the Methodist Church, through participation in the Methodist Conference and Methodist Council over many years; and for six years I represented the Methodist Church on the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.

In 2017 our daughter, Seraphina, was born; and a very special moment was the occasion of her baptism, in our local Catholic church by its parish priest, in the context of a united service with Anglicans, Methodists, URC, Catholics and Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Christians together.

I took up the role of Connexional Ecumenical Officer for the Methodist Church on 29 April 2024, for an initial appointment of five years to August 2029.

Reminder for Forthcoming Events

NWCT Church Leaders Declaration of Commitment to Christian Unity

This will be held on Christ the King, 24 November 2024 at 3.30pm. The service will be held in the Anglican Cathedral Norwich. The sermon will be given by Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary of Churches Together in England.



Our Ecumenical Commitment for Christian Unity

Together in Christ, Bound by Love, Serving as One

*I am not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, who are in the world in your name, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:20-21)

CTE Forum 2025

Bringing together more than three hundred representatives of [Member Churches](#), [Intermediate Bodies](#), [Co-ordinating Groups](#) and [Charities and Networks in Association](#), the Churches Together in England Forum is the broadest ecumenical gathering of Christians in England.



The CTE Forum happens every three years and will take place from teatime on **Monday 17 March to lunchtime on Wednesday 19 March 2025 at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.**

Delegates to Forum will hear keynote addresses from senior Christian leaders including a President of the World Council of Churches, **Rev Dr Susan Durber**, **Archbishop Doye Adama**, **Professor David Wilkinson**, **Bishop Claion Grandison** and our [CTE Presidents](#). A full list of speakers will be available later in 2024. There will also be the opportunity to attend seminars and workshops, to worship together and to make new ecumenical connections.

Forum is an opportunity to be encouraged by the diversity and depth of Christian witness in England, and to be enriched by forging new relationships and connections and listening deeply to one another.

The 2025 Forum theme is **One But Not The Same: Celebrating diversity – Living with difference.**

Forum is a delegate conference and therefore not open to all. NWCT is only able to send two delegates. [Find out how you might be able to attend through other routes.](#)

[Visit the Forum 2025 homepage.](#)

Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so also I am sending you.” When He had said this, He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit....” (John 20:21-22)



[Key links](#)

Churches Together in England
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Conference of European Churches
World Council of Churches
Society of Ecumenical Studies
Unity News Across East of England
Hope Together

<https://cte.org.uk/>
<https://ctbi.org.uk/>
<https://ceceurope.org/>
<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/>
<https://ecumenicalstudies.org/a-tent-of-learning/>
[Link to East of England News](#)
<https://www.hopetogether.org.uk>

[Edited by Dr Ian Watson](#)

County Ecumenical Officer
Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney

For comments, feedback and to submit news email: nwct-watson@outlook.com

[See the next page for a copy of the NWCT’s Church Leaders Declaration of Commitment to Christian Unity](#)



Our Ecumenical Commitment for Christian Unity

Together in Christ, Bound by Love, Serving as One

Inspired by the prayer of Christ for Unity, we, as Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney, strive to embody the spirit of ecumenism.

Together in Christ

With open hearts and minds, we share a commitment to foster a harmonious and loving Christian Community that transcends denominational boundaries.

Bound by Love

By respecting and valuing each other's traditions and beliefs, we seek to foster a spirit of collaboration in spreading the message of God's love to all.

Serving as One

In this spirit of togetherness, we are living out the Gospel's call to serve, uplift and support all who live, work and visit Norfolk and Waveney. As fellow pilgrims we support one another as we journey together in faith and prayer.

Our Priorities

There are five main priorities to achieve our ecumenical commitment:

1. Sharing friendship and understanding.
2. Sharing prayer, deepening our communion with Christ and proclaiming the Gospel.
3. Helping the lost and vulnerable, and serving those who suffer poverty and disadvantage.
4. Speaking with one voice in common witness whenever we are able to do so.

Church Leaders Declaration of Commitment for Christian Unity

As Leaders of Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney we acknowledge with thankfulness:

- ❖ Our common faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Our common call to serve in God's mission.
- ❖ The diversity of our traditions and the different gifts each brings to our common life.

We rejoice in the partnership of trust and cooperation that has grown between us over recent years. We believe we are called by God to share our life more deeply, and to offer to the world a united witness and a shared service. We believe that we have been led by the Holy Spirit to make this public commitment, and as fellow pilgrims we declare to:

- ❖ Worship, pray, study and work together for the unity and mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel to all.
- ❖ Consult together on issues affecting the common good.
- ❖ Whenever possible speak with one voice in common witness.
- ❖ Share resources wherever possible.
- ❖ Make available guidance and support to our Local Ecumenical Partnerships, Churches Together Groups, and all other ecumenical projects/ agencies in Norfolk and Waveney.
- ❖ Provide visible and positive leadership in support of these commitments.

We invite all Christians in Norfolk and Waveney to support us in this declaration to which we now commit ourselves, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

TO BE SIGNED BY THE FOLLOWING ON THE DAY OF CHRIST THE KING, 24TH NOVEMBER 2024, IN NORWICH CATHEDRAL

Rev Helen Hollands

Chair in East Anglia Methodist District

Major Howard Russell

East of England Divisional Commander for the Salvation Army

Ms Liz Hoffbauer

The Society of Friends - Quakers

Rev Lythan Nevard

Moderator for the Eastern Synod URC

Rev David Mayne

Regional Minister Team Leader for the Eastern Baptist Association

Rt Rev Peter Collins

Roman Catholic Bishop of East Anglia

Rt Rev Graham Usher

Diocesan Bishop in the Church of England