

## WORD IN ACTION

# Little steps in ecumenism



**Uli Yeomans** shares her experience of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, in her home town of Chorley, Lancashire.

**I was quite looking forward** to meeting up with the relatively small group of ‘regulars’ at the annual ‘Unity Service’ during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but waited in vain for a notice or a poster in our church. It seemed as if there was zero appetite for it, or encouragement from any quarter locally and somebody said ‘unity week might have been cancelled this year!’ Well, it was not in my books and I decided on making a little personal effort on a grassroots level to continue building bridges between our churches locally.

**I put some information** into the parish newsletter, which is my responsibility and our parish priest preached enthusiastically a couple of times about it, thus putting unity week on the map. Then on Tuesday morning three of us from the Word of Life Scripture group went to the local Elim Pentecostal Living Waters Church Café for a drink (and cake!). We identified ourselves as Roman Catholics and asked them to show us their church, which they did enthusiastically. We established a lovely relationship and learned about their work: how they worship and have believer’s baptism, and hope to set up a soup kitchen for those in need in Chorley. They already run a food bank and we affirmed the connections we have as churches, since our congregation also contributes weekly to this food bank. We left with new friends!

**On Friday, four members** of our group took part in the Anglican Eucharist at the church, which allows us to use a room for our monthly Word of Life meetings. St Laurence parishioners made us feel very welcome and we received an excellent sermon on Mary and the wedding feast at Cana. At the moment of Communion, we really felt the pain and sadness of the division which prevents us from receiving the sacrament together.

To live up to all the inspirations I had felt for this week, I sat down and wrote a letter to the Methodist Minister who is ecumenically most active in our town, the Rev Andrew Mashiter. I was informed that he was on a sabbatical, but I wanted to report to him about the Focolare Travelling Together conference I had attended in Rome last May (see New City July 2017). However, before I had checked out where to send the letter, I noticed a poster in the local ‘Bible shop’ inviting people to the Churches together in Chorley Unity Service at Trinity Methodist Church. I couldn’t believe my eyes – Rev Andrew Mashiter was leading it, his sabbatical having finished!

**We had invited a friend for lunch** that same Sunday, but it was no problem to leave before coffee, and I made it to the service. This turned out to have been very well prepared and beautiful – four local church/group leaders spoke about their practical and ecumenical projects which were far broader than homelessness, loneliness, food banks and so on, as they all focused on the theme ‘...your right hand is glorious in power’. What came through was that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the effort and mutual love we put into our projects, brings fruit in spite of our limited available time and capabilities.

**Once again I made new friends**, including a Quaker gentleman who invited me to the next local meeting of Churches Together. I was also able to hand over the letter I had written to Rev Andrew Mashiter, in person!

And this is exactly how I felt about my experience of Unity Week: if I wait for change, and for things to be placed on a plate before me, I will wait in vain. However, if I make a start with what little I can manage; God’s powerful love – for me and for humankind – does the rest. 🍷

