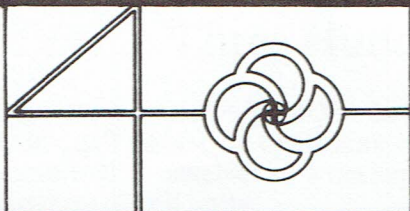


CONVICTIONS  
AND  
COMMENDATIONS

*Easter 1980*



THE  
FOUR  
CHURCHES  
SUTTON

## That The World May Believe

“ . . . may they all be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me. The glory which thou gavest me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, may they be perfectly one. Then the world will learn that thou didst send me, that thou didst love them as thou didst me.”

S. John's Gospel 17 : 21—23

### **The Covenant**

**The four churches covenant with God and with each other to work and pray together with the aim of sharing life and buildings by Easter Day, 1980.**

May 14, 1972

### **Three Hundred**

There are now more than 300 Local Ecumenical Projects in Britain, in each of which Christians of different denominations have committed themselves to working and worshipping together in anticipation of full unity.

## Foreword

I warmly commend this booklet concerning the Four Churches in Sutton. I hope you will give it careful consideration. I commend it to you for study.

✚ MERVYN SOUTHWARK,  
*Lord Bishop of Southwark.*

## Commendations

*“O Lord . . .  
Preserve me from the enemy who has something to gain;  
and from the friend who has something to lose . . .”*

So T. S. Eliot prayed in ‘Chorus from “The Rock”’.

It is a prayer appropriate for you at Sutton now. After years of discussions the moment for decision has come.

One of the reasons why Sutton Christians have been called to explore and plan a new life together was that the enemy had so much to gain from a divided Church. From such an enemy we need to pray to be delivered. But, Eliot reminds us, we need to be delivered also from the friend who has something to lose.

Each of the four churches in Sutton has something to gain from the proposed new plan. Each has something to lose. You will have thought of how much you had to lose—buildings, existing patterns of life, separateness . . .

Is there something you have to lose too much? When Jesus said:  
“unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies,  
it remains only a single grain;  
but if it dies,  
it yields a rich harvest.”  
was He thinking only of individuals?

Does it now apply only to Churches?

At the February meeting of the Council of the London Baptist Association we prayed that you and all God's people in Sutton would be led of God's Spirit to take the right decision.

We shall continue to pray.

—The Revd Douglas C. Sparkes,  
*General Superintendent, Metropolitan Area,  
The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland.*

I believe that the life of the whole Church is being guided in the direction of a visible unity, and that this will be a gift of God to the Church when we are ready for it. I am equally sure that this is a distant goal which will be difficult to reach.

However, there is developing amongst Christians a growth in understanding and sharing which will not be reversed. To be involved in a coming-together in a particular place, as are the members of the Four Churches in Sutton, is to be caught up in what God is doing with his whole Church, and to be part of that Church's future! The members of the Four Churches are in that very position, and I pray that they will find the right way forward in unity.

—The Revd Wilfred H. Jones,  
*Chairman of the London South West District  
of the Methodist Church.*

In my Sutton file there is a copy of a proposed Four Churches Council Constitution. The first article says “A council shall be formed to promote the unity and mission of Sutton Baptist Church, S.Nicholas (Church of England), Sutton Congregational Church,

and Trinity Methodist Church, hereinafter known as the Four Churches in the London Borough of Sutton”.

It is interesting to note the use of the two words “unity” and “mission”. In the minds of those who drafted the constitution it would seem that unity was *for* mission, and that mission was dependent upon *unity*. The Sutton “experiment” aroused, and still does give rise to, considerable interest in many parts of the country. It has been a pioneering work and has pointed the way in unity and mission for similar projected groupings in other areas.

Since the preparation of the constitution, the Congregational Church has become a part of the United Reformed Church. In a Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church which is read aloud at Ordination and Induction Services, these words occur . . .

“The United Reformed Church declares its intention, in fellowship with all the Churches, to pray and work for such visible unity of the whole Church as Christ wills and in the way he wills, in order that men and nations may be led more and more to glorify the Father in Heaven.”

The will to unite which drew our two former congregations together has not faded over the seven years of our existence. We believe it is one of the ways in which God has led us to be fitted for more effective mission.

As you become very closely involved in decisions concerning the shape of the unity of the four churches I pray that you will be deeply aware of God’s guidance and his enabling that your obedience may give growing strength to your witness.

—The Revd C. C. Franks,  
*Moderator, Southern Province,  
United Reformed Church.*

# Viewpoints

## From The Revd Edward Rusby . . .

During this month there will be much heartburning and searching of mind and conscience, and we shall all need the spirit of charity in our discussions and a recognition that those who do not agree with us are sincere in their views and are entitled to express them.

Like many people, I see innumerable problems ahead if we decide to go into one building, but I am now convinced enough along two or three main lines to make me eager to go ahead in faith and to grasp the opportunity which has been presented.

Our God is not the God of the nostalgic past and the static present—He is the God of the living present and of the future. I see Him, therefore, as the God who is always ahead of us, the God who calls us to move into the future informed by tradition and transformed by the present—the God who beckons us to share in his creative work.

—EDWARD RUSBY,  
*Rector, S. Nicholas Church.*

## From The Revd Gethin Abraham-Williams

The unity we seek is not primarily because of external pressures or economic necessity, such things, if they count at all, merely provide us with an opportunity, but to make real our Lord's prayer that we might be one "that the world may believe".

In any choir there are four different parts: soprano and tenor, alto and bass. The glory of the music is only achieved when all four but distinctive parts are in harmony. It is that harmony that our quest for shared life requires. The quest is for unity not uniformity. The ecumenical movement has never seen our future in terms of all parts, as it were, singing only the melody line. We each have our

own rich and distinctive heritage to blend with others to make the harmony real.

We are living in times of great disharmony: between the rich and poor countries of the world; between black and white; East and West; Jew and Moslem; Protestant and Catholic; Government and Unions; and within ourselves. If our life in Sutton can become a parable of the ultimate harmony between God and man, and between man and man, then we shall not have failed our Lord in this place of our discipleship now.

To bring our various voices together into one harmonious whole will not be without cost, but in that the motivating force will be to do His will, we can be more than confident that His grace will be sufficient for all our needs. No one, therefore, will be more excited than I if prayerfully and expectantly we decide to take it.

—GETHIN ABRAHAM-WILLIAMS,  
*Sutton Baptist Church.*

## From The Revd Roger Ducker

If the Four Churches really are committed to each other in unity, convinced that they should, in the words of their Covenant, share both life and buildings, then surely we must approve the proposals before us. I shall certainly vote in favour myself, and I hope that a large majority in all four churches will do so.

It is not for me to tell others how they should vote. But I do want to urge everyone to speak in the discussions and vote when the time comes for what they believe to be right. It is vitally important that we get as full a turn-out as possible and a genuine expression of what our members really believe.

Having said that, I re-affirm my own conviction that, given a real commitment to sharing life and buildings, the Four

Churches should accept these proposals. May God give us the courage to go forward together in unity!

—ROGER F. DUCKER,  
*Trinity Methodist Church.*

## From The Revd Wesley Workman

“Now is the acceptable time . . .” and the time of acceptance! It is a moment we have been awaiting for a long time, for the members of the Four Churches eight years, for me only two years—but our coming to Sutton was on the basis of this decision. The call given to Yvonne and me by the U.R.C. people was a call supported and endorsed by the Four Churches, who, it was said, were committed to their Covenant with God and to their unity with one another. We rejoice that we have been given such an unrepeatable opportunity to fulfil our commitment at such a significant moment—Easter 1980—the date all British Churches agreed back in 1964. Our decision to move forward together will be of enormous value to the Church nationally and internationally, and at the same time to all who are concerned with the Church’s message to the nation at this stage of plurality and to the world in its tragic divisions.

The healing of the nations starts in Sutton—*now.*

—WESLEY WORKMAN,  
*Trinity United Reformed Church.*



# Statement of The Four Churches Council

In urging acceptance of the proposed scheme, the Four Churches Council is not unmindful of the doubts and worries of individual members of the Four Churches. In many respects we have not yet adequately prepared ourselves to take this step, even though we have been sharing life increasingly over the years since the Covenant was made. However, this is certainly a unique and momentous decision with which we are faced, and the following paragraphs set out the reasons for our conviction.

## **Worship**

The heart of any church is the worship within it, and the strength with which that heart beats determines the vigour with which the Church is able to serve the local community. However, worship is a very personal matter, and different people find that different styles and even different interpretations best fulfil their individual needs. It is vital that the one Church should retain, like a rope, the individual strengths of the four separate threads making it up, and gain still a fifth strand from its new and separate being. Therefore the continued support of all the individual members—particularly those who at best cannot visualise a fully integrated whole at present—is necessary to maintain those traditions in good heart. This is not an indication of disunity but an expression of the natural diversity of human nature.

The Four Churches Council believes that the redevelopment proposals, together with those of the Shared Life Group, provide a basis which will ensure the retention of the traditions of our individual denominations and will further stimulate the sharing and mutual understanding of our various traditions of worship. This is essential if the Church is to be visibly reconciled in the eyes of the community.

## **The Opportunities**

While there are various shades of opinion at this moment

among the many members of the four congregations as to the detail, all will acknowledge the unique opportunity before us; to create in the centre of Sutton an exciting building that will eradicate almost at a stroke the problems that our buildings will undoubtedly give us as their age increases, and, at the same time, to be a unique witness to lead Christian Worship into the twenty-first century.

**The opportunity is *now*—it will not come again in this form—and, while there are many details still to be resolved, future congregations will look on our decision as an opportunity gravely missed if we do not grasp it and agree to go forward in this magnificent new home.**

## **Mission**

In the remarkable changes that have come about in the present century, Christians the world over have increasingly realised that unity and mission are inextricably bound together. Our own locality is rapidly undergoing considerable change. A new commercial and office centre brings several thousand people to work in the centre of Sutton day by day, and for them the Churches have as yet made little provision. New buildings designed for such activity would enable us to offer what we cannot do individually: friendship and counselling, worship and attractive facilities for light refreshments for all who cross our threshold. Such provisions are equally appropriate for the residents of the area, where the development of housing brings to our doorstep many people in need of friendship and support, including the bereaved, those who live alone, and those left alone with young children for long hours each working day. What we have started in our separate buildings—playgroups, young wives' groups, mother-and-toddlers' clubs, etc., would become much more effective when centralised with our combined resources under one roof.

## **Wider Implications**

In common with many Church leaders, we believe that progress toward national Church unity is dependent upon the success of local ventures such as that in Sutton. Many leading Christians

are anxiously looking to us to show the way in which Churches can come together from positions of strength rather than of weakness, and demonstrate that the Church is eager to adapt to meet the needs of future generations. Failure to seize the opportunity now before us would be taken as an indication of the divisions that are destroying the credibility of the established churches for an increasing number of people. To quote the new Archbishop of Canterbury: "How can we preach unity among men and women if we are not united ourselves?" (BBC, January 23, 1980).

### **Christian Obedience**

The strong argument in favour of fully shared life must be considered in the light of our Christian obedience to God. It is impossible for us to doubt that in the coming together of our four churches in the past decade we have been led by God, and moved in our own life by the worldwide activity of the Spirit in the Church.

We have entered into a solemn Covenant to share life and buildings. Without this present opportunity we might argue that we are now doing much of what is possible. But with this opportunity it seems to us impossible to argue that sharing life would be more effective in our separate and ageing buildings than in a new purpose-built centre as proposed. If this is true—and we most profoundly believe it to be so—then the issue is simply one of Christian obedience to God's leading, in faith and trust in his providence.

### **Our Recommendations**

We unanimously recommend the acceptance of the proposed scheme to share life in a new suite of buildings.

We are deeply conscious of the guidance of God that brought us into our Covenant eight years ago and which now offers us on the eve of Easter 1980 this remarkable opportunity for the fulfilment of the Covenant.

The imaginative development of the buildings that is now

available brings the prospect of realising a vision in which we may worship God and serve the neighbourhood—a visible demonstration of our fundamental unity that preserves the essential beliefs and practices of our different traditions. The opportunity of daily worship and of service to the community in central Sutton greatly exceeds anything that can be attempted in our present premises on their separate sites.

We are convinced that, because of the understanding and confidence that has grown between us in recent years, there is no fear that any of our distinctive traditions could be eroded. We recommend that we go forward together in obedience to God and with complete faith in his leadership.

## *Thoughts from The Wider Church*

How many times have we meditated together on the last will of Christ, that asks the Father for his disciples the gift of unity?

—POPE JOHN PAUL II

Religious divisions are a scandal. Christians who are divided from each other are in a poor position from which to preach peace and reconciliation to an unimpressed world.

—CARDINAL BASIL HUME

### *A Prayer*

O God of peace, Who through Thy Son Jesus Christ didst send forth one faith for the salvation of mankind, send Thy grace and heavenly blessing upon all Christian people who are striving to draw nearer to Thee and to each other, in the unity of the spirit and in the bond of peace. Give us penitence for our divisions, wisdom to know Thy Truth, courage to do Thy Will, love which shall break down the barriers of pride and prejudice, and an unswerving loyalty to Thy Holy Name. Suffer us not to shrink from any endeavour, which is in accordance with Thy will, for the peace and unity of Thy Church. Give us boldness to seek only Thy glory and the advancement of Thy Kingdom. Unite us all in Thee as Thou O Father with Thy Son and the Holy Ghost, art one God, world without end. Amen.

—BISHOP ANDERSON,  
*19th Century*