

THE FOUR CHURCHES IN CENTRAL SUTTON.

"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".

The Four Churches Council.

<u>Anglican</u>	<u>Baptist</u>	<u>Methodist</u>	<u>U.R.C.</u>
The Rev'd. J. Higgins Mr. G. Brown	The Rev'd. G. Abraham-Williams Dr. K. Hyde	The Rev'd. D. Creamer Mrs. E Bean Mr. O. Jayne	The Rev'd. Dr. S. Orchard Mrs. C. Garret Dr. E. Brown (Treasurer)

Which has:-

Produced "Four"

Commissioned a preliminary survey - The Cope Report

Set up the Neighbourhood Action Group (Chairman- Mr John Griffiths)

Organised two conferences-

- (i) : An open meeting at Sutton United Reform Church on 10th. November 1973
- (ii) A residential weekend from 16th to 18th November 1973 at the Winchester Diocesan House, Old Alresford, Hampshire.

The Methodist representatives at the latter were-

Ruth Griffiths  
Carolyn and David Gooch  
Trevor Johns  
David Prest  
Basil Buck,

who share with you the following notes on the discussions which took place.

The conference delegates were drawn from the congregations of the four central Sutton Churches and were divided into three discussion groups, each of which also contained a member of the Four Churches Council. An attempt has been made to summarise as briefly as possible the issues which were discussed under the headings of Buildings, Fellowship, Mission, and Worship.

The ideas and suggestions put forward by the groups are merely reported in the following notes and are not listed in any order of priority. It must be emphasised that this conference was in no way decision making but simply afforded an opportunity for full discussion of the problems affecting the future of the Four Churches.

1. BUILDINGS.

Most delegates agreed that the Four Churches should decide very soon whether or not a completely new Ecumenical complex should be built, and if so, where; or alternatively whether any of the existing buildings would be suitable. Questions and suggestions discussed included-

- (a) Should the St. Nicholas site be used for any new Ecumenical Centre?
- (b) A survey should be initiated of existing buildings to ascertain their usage; to form a basis for deciding what be needed in any new complex.

- (c) Obtaining a rough valuation of each site and confirmation that there is no restriction on the commercial development of any of the sites.
- (d) Deciding how the existing memorials, stained glass etc., could be preserved and incorporated in any new building.
- (e) Considering how any new complex should be owned. The possibility of setting up a 'Four Churches Company', limited by guarantee was suggested; but this question, it was generally considered, should be resolved by lawyers.

Delegates recognised that there were still many administrative, financial and legal difficulties to be resolved apart from the above, but most of these were outside the scope of the conference.

## 2 FELLOWSHIP.

The groups discussed the manner in which fellowship could be promoted so that the congregations of the Four Churches could get to know each other better, and exchange ideas and information. It was suggested that this could be achieved by, e.g.:-

- (a) More united evening services, some shortened and followed by coffee and group discussion.
- (b) A merging of activities, both spiritual and social, e.g. house groups, women's meetings, men's meetings, sporting and social activities, uniformed organisations, etc.
- (c) Improving inter-church communication.
- (d) Continuing to encourage "Forum".
- (e) "FOUR" to contain details of social activities.

## 3. MISSION.

It was realised that that Mission and Fellowship are closely allied and that there is an individual as well as a Four Churches element: but generally Mission was seen as follows:-

- (a) To see that help and friendship is available to all, especially outgoing care for the lonely, aged and bereaved.
- (b) Contacting people who move into the area, e.g. through the Neighbourhood Action Group and Church Visitors.
- (c) Providing assistance and temporary accommodation for the homeless.
- (d) Continuing support for external missions.
- (e) Possibly providing lunch-time services and other facilities for local office workers, shoppers etc.

#### 4. WORSHIP.

Considerable discussion took place on this subject and some fairly strong opinions were expressed. It was generally thought, however, that although problems did exist, none were insoluble. Among the suggestions put forward were:-

- (a) The possibility of the Anglican congregation worshipping in the Baptist Church. It was thought that this would make the next step toward unity less difficult.
- (b) A visiting minister conducting his own denominational service for his own and the host congregations, e.g. an Anglican priest conducting Evensong in Trinity.
- (c) Work towards forms of service acceptable to all four congregations. It was accepted that the Anglican insistence on the celebration of the Eucharist at a major Sunday morning service each week was likely to be a considerable problem, but one that could be overcome, given goodwill on all sides.

#### 5. GENERAL.

From the complexity of the suggestions and problems discussed it became clear to the conference that a great deal of work was needed. In particular it was realised that it was unreasonable to expect the Four Churches Council to take it all upon themselves. It was, therefore, the general view that serious consideration be given to appointing a paid "ecumenical officer" to assist the council in matters of administration and liaison between the Four Churches.

It was also felt that there was a need for a deep personal commitment by all concerned in order to promote better understanding between the churches, such as that understanding which developed between those who attended this conference.