



Churches Together in Alresford May 2022 Newsletter

Reflections of an Ageing CTIA member

I joined Churches Together in Alresford some thirty years ago, and have greatly enjoyed the company, sincerity, assistance, worship and friendship of so many fellow Christians as we unite whenever we can.

It was not ever thus! I rejoice at the progress we have made. I recall my time as a Wolf Cub, taking part in the Annual St George's Day Parade when the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Wolf Cubs and Brownies of Nottinghamshire would march through Southwell to the Minster, for a service. However, I and all the other Catholics were told by our parents that at the entrance to the Minster we were to peel off and wait to be collected. So I never saw the inside of any other-than-Catholic Christian edifice until I was deemed old enough to attend funerals and weddings.

And I have suffered as a result. For instance, post-retirement I have come to embrace and enjoy the ringing of church bells, and especially in St John's Church. But what a struggle at my age, as I watch with admiration and frustration as teenagers are welcomed into the Bell Tower and rapidly pick up the necessary techniques and methods while I flounder, thinking "If only I had started much, much earlier".

Now I'm going to name-drop shamelessly. When I was talking to the Most Reverend The Lord Archbishop George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury at the turn of the century at a dinner in a marquee in Winchester Cathedral Close I told His Grace that His Holiness Pope John Paul II – I claimed we were good mates and said I was soon going to meet the Archbishop – had indicated that were the Archbishop to make three requests, which would be given serious consideration, what might those requests be?

His Grace lost no time in entering into the spirit of the exercise: would his Holiness recognise the Holy Orders of the Church of England? Would he welcome Christians of other churches to receive communion in the Catholic Church? And would he accept and encourage the wishes of women in the Catholic Church who wished to be ordained into the priesthood?

A few years earlier I had met again, after a few decades, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Basil Hume – he I did know from old as he had been a monk at my school – when he addressed the Annual gathering of The Association of Interchurch Families, and was asked what words of encouragement he would give the Association? He made various remarks about uniting in worship whenever possible; but also asked "What are you going to do over the issue of St Peter?"

These are indeed heavy questions, supposedly going to the heart of our churches' foundations. Who knows how those questions will be answered? One way might be through the current initiative that the Pope has begun to create a "Synodal Church." The Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth writes "Our Holy Father Pope Francis has invited the Catholic Church to embark on a journey together. Through listening and discernment rooted in the Holy Spirit, the entire people of God will be called to contribute to a process by which the Church deepens in understanding of Her mission and looks toward the future"

Who knows where this will lead us?

Piers Armstrong