

How being part of the Thy Kingdom Come ecumenical initiative has influenced and shaped my faith journey

Thy Kingdom Come has been an inspiration and, each year, it brings new surprises. For me, the journey began in 2017 when Bishop Paul asked if I would be willing to be interviewed as part of the St Albans' Beacon celebration. I turned up rather unsure about what I would say and more than slightly intimidated by the sea of nearly 2,000 faces that filled the cathedral as far as the eye could see but, in that moment, the unexpected experiences of the previous week all fell neatly into place. I knew why I was there and the story I had to tell. I came away from the service with my heart singing a Magnificat, filled with the wonder of God's power and goodness.

The following year, I was invited to join the ecumenical planning group in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire for Thy Kingdom Come. It was a profound privilege to find myself sitting around a table with senior Baptist, Methodist, Coptic and Anglican Christians all filled with the same desire to create and promote an equally vibrant celebration of Thy Kingdom Come for 2018. Once again, there was a surprise in store. It was the year of the Royal Wedding and the Archbishop of Canterbury announced that he would like to celebrate the Beacon event with us immediately after the ceremony. He even missed out on the wedding breakfast to join us in St Albans and he brought Bishop Michael Curry, who preached such a stirring sermon at the wedding, as his guest. The congregation swelled to nearly 3,000 and we moved all the seating out of the nave to fit everyone in. There was a strong emphasis on young people, praise and worship was led by Soul Survivor and the atmosphere was filled with joy and thanksgiving. This year, and in 2019, I was mainly involved in the design of prayer stations which brought the personal benefit of spending quality time in the historic church on installation day.

The challenge of 2020 was the same as that faced by everyone; to move online at short notice. Together we produced an impressive array of videos, prayer stories and downloadable material to share on social media. There was a good spread of input from different denominations across the two counties but, for me, it was not our differences that were highlighted but the strengths and value of working together as a team.

Looking back, I can see my call to ecumenism unfolding. Baptised and Confirmed in the Church of England, I was received into the Catholic Church at the age of 17. As a hospital chaplain, I was part of a multi-denominational, and indeed multi-faith, team that worked together to care for the spiritual and religious needs of all patients. Throughout this ministry, I enjoyed the support and fellowship of Christians Across Watford and more recently I have

found new encouragement and opportunities for growth in Hemel Hempstead, where the Churches Together Group comprises no less than 30 individual churches. Now, as a Trustee of Churches Together in Hertfordshire, more relationships are developing county-wide. Praying with and learning from other traditions has brought both richness and challenges to my understanding of my own, and others', faith. I treasure the friendships that have grown out of shared experiences of God working with and through the people we are. It reminds me of the words of Blessed John Henry Newman: "God has created me to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another." Like small pieces in the very large jigsaw of His Kingdom we each make a unique and essential contribution.

In terms of my own faith journey, Thy Kingdom Come always represents a fresh call to this service. The tasks are often unlikely and unexpected - a timely reminder that it is His kingdom and His will to be done, and not mine. It is in serving that I, in turn, am awakened anew to His presence in my life. Each year I am privileged to be part of the fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Pentecost brings. The beautiful simplicity of the idea behind Thy Kingdom Come: to pray for five, to pray in whatever way you can is accessible to all and unites us in the mission that is so close to Jesus' heart; that we may all be one.

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