**CHURCHES TOGETHER IN LUTON (CTL)**

**Meeting of Truth and Reconciliation (online by Zoom)**

**Tuesday 20th October 2020**

**7:00 pm – 8:45 pm**

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| **In Attendance** | **Name and Church** |  |
|  | Vincent Cox – Chair  Senior Pastor  New Testament Church of God | CTL Executive | Better Together Network |
|  | Tony Thompson – Co-Chair  Lead Elder  Hope Church | CTL Executive |
|  | Michael Singleton  Community Church Luton | CTL Chairperson |
|  | Bishop Alvin Blake BEM  Jurisdictional Bishop  Calvary Church of God in Christ (COGIC) |  |
|  | Everton Blake  COGIC | CTL Executive |
|  | Steve Moody  Senior Pastor  Stopsley Baptist Church |  |
|  | Monsignor Kevin McGinnell  Parish Priest and Area Dean  Holy Ghost Parish Church |  |
|  | David Kesterton  Vicar and Area Dean  All Saints with St Peter | Chaplain to Luton Town Football Club |
|  | Kate Lomax  Vicar  St Paul’s Church |  |
|  | Peter Adams  St Mary’s Church | Director, St Mary’s Centre for Peace and Reconciliation |
|  | Dr Trevor Adams  Church of God of Prophecy | Better Together Network | Pastoral Mentor and Learning Coach |
|  | Sue Penn  Mount Pleasant Methodist Church | CTL Secretary |
|  | Mike Nichols  Lead Pastor  Luton Christian Fellowship |  |
|  | Julie Bradshaw  Circuit Superintendent  Methodist Church |  |
|  | Overseer David Lewin  Senior Pastor  Bethel Apostolic Church | Better Together Network |
|  | Ulrike Hunt  St Mary’s Church | Prayer for Luton | The Feast Youth Project |
|  | Lloyd Denny DL  Senior Minister and General Secretary  Restoration Revival Fellowship | Deputy lieutenant of Bedfordshire | Better Together Network |
|  | Andrew Gale  Senior Pastor  Central Baptist Church |  |
|  | Margaret Seaton  Lead Pastor  Assemblies of the Firstborn | Better Together Network |
| **Apologies** |  |  |
|  | Grace Sentamu-Baverstock  Vicar  St Luke’s Church |  |
|  | Bishop David Foh-Amoh  Senior Pastor  Liberty House Worship Ministry | Better Together Network |
|  | Larry Ogundimu  Senior Pastor  Christ Believers Fellowship | CTL Executive | Better Together Network |

**NB:**

1. On 2nd October 2020, Sue Penn, Secretary to CTL posted the invitation to this meeting on the CTL website and sent email invitations to 66 church leaders in Luton.
2. On 3rd October 2020, Vincent Cox posted the invitation on the Better Together Network’s WhatsApp. The Better Together Network is the Black Church and Community Leaders group.

Vincent Cox (VC) asked Kate Lomax to open the meeting in prayer.

VC explained that the CTL executive feel that we need to seek to positively deal with issues from the past and then seek to build together for the future. We want to go beyond making statements, we want to do things that look to deal with the pain of the past and we want to build something in the future.

As part of his opening statement, VC said that his initial introduction to Luton back in 2015 was positive. Canon Tony Sellers invited his family to dinner at his home and told him about CTL, the prayer meetings and other church related meetings. When he attended his third CTL prayer meeting along with his Associate Pastor, an Anglican Curate asked them if they had to train or take exams to be a minister in NTCG.

VC went on to say that as a black man and a Pentecostal minister, he is aware that sometimes in ecumenical settings, he is disadvantaged twice over.

VC said that if this meeting is to be successful, we need to be open and not hide and shrink.

**Summaries**

**Dr Trevor Adams**– The key is relationships between church leaders from different backgrounds, however previous experience says that relationships do not always go deep enough to explore the roots that separate us, the roots go very deep. Exploring those roots is uncomfortable, so we do not go there. It means exploring our different experiences, different training, and salaries. It means exploring residue issues from the slave trade.

**Bishop Alvin Blake** – There are 3 major issues facing us today, BLM, racism, and Coronavirus. Any feeling of inferiority or superiority is a sickness. These issues are not new and need to be understood otherwise they destroy God’s creation and people within it. It is not just a black and white issue; he has been personally “beaten up” by people of all nations. We need to look to scripture. We must talk to people as children of God.

**Pastor Margaret Seaton** – Shared her personal experience of coming from the Caribbean, where the races mixed amicably, to arriving in the UK where she was shocked by the racism she encountered. She and her family were asked to leave the Anglican church without explanation. Rejection is not pleasant. Black people were asked to come and help build the infrastructure of this country, now they have been made to feel like outcasts. The infrastructure of this country is built on racism, the slave trade, and the wealth of the Caribbean islands. She felt what happened to George Floyd personally. We need to celebrate black history all the while, not just one month a year. Black people need to be proud of their heritage. Like Trevor, she felt we needed to get to root issues, not just surface issues. In the 1990s Margaret led worship in a Methodist church and has studied at the Anglican Theological College. Currently she works with other churches within Churches Together in Leagrave and has excellent relationships there.

**Bishop David Lewin** – The biggest issue is the racism of silence. He was not wanted in the Civil Service despite proven ability. He had scored the highest scores on the selection process, but they did not realise he was being black prior to his appointment. He quoted Wilberforce as saying that he was beaten for reading Luke 10 v 30 – 37 and daring to suggest that the Good Samaritan was a black man. He said that was the only time he was beaten publicly, because he dared to purport that love should be extended to the black man. Somehow, It is difficult to talk about black rights, but we need to. Somehow, everyone else can receive but we must beg or make a case. We need to break the silence; It is our Christian duty to do the right thing.

1. Response from White pastors.

**David Kesterton** – Church of England has a troubled history, and he is personally aware of recent examples where racist attitudes prevail. A black clergyman told that he did not get a parish because he would not fit into a predominantly white context. The letter of apology making matters worse. The denomination nationally and locally is committed to action. Clergy locally are having unconscious bias training. It is a time to lament. BLM has shined a light on an issue that cannot be ignored.

**FMonsignor Kevin McGinnell** – he used the metaphor of a sea of masks that hide the real person. We need to get to know people behind the masks. A similar sentiment to Trevor and Margaret. His family, from an Irish background, had personal experience of being the victims of racism as he grew up in Birmingham. He was aware of the danger of creating an Irish Ghetto. We need to do things differently in the church and acknowledge that many people experience prejudice in the church as well as outside it. Within his congregations he is aware of the prejudice experienced by the traveller community and Pakistani Catholics as well as Black people. We need to have a wider understanding of what it means to be one new man in Christ. To remove the masks.

**Steve Moody** – BLM presented a challenge to himself and his church. They held a listening evening which was deeply uncomfortable but helpful. It was difficult to be surrounded by brokenness, but the only way forward is through humility and a desire to learn. We need to help people to respond well to rejection. We need to move beyond a #tag culture to longer term solutions. Commit ourselves to listen even if it is hard. We need to move from the past to dream together about the future.

**Tony Thompson** – Admitted his own personal racism and contribution to the problem both before and after becoming a Christian of which he is ashamed and desiring forgiveness. Asking for and receiving forgiveness being a prerequisite to move on. However, we should not underestimate the challenge ahead. Even when more aware of these issues, he and other white church leaders were slow to grasp the significance of what happened to George Floyd. As others have said we need to build friendships that can help us better understand each other and the root issues.

1. Exploring ways forward.

Several suggestions of ways forward were mentioned. This is important because the black community is aware and excited that the meeting was happening but were looking for more than just statements.

Vincent Cox said the Hebrews left Egyptian slavery with resources, Nehemiah was given resources to rebuild the wall but at the abolition of slavery in the UK the former slave masters received reparations and the former slaves left without resources and had to work for free for four to six years to stabilise the British economy. We also had to contribute to repaying the loan the British government took out to pay reparations. We need to look at tangible outcomes, like the transfer of assets.

Steve Moody said that we are committing to being on a journey in which we can have conversations that dream about what things can look like.

Ulrike Hunt mentioned that she works with The Feast to bring groups together and wondered if there was space to bring black and white young people across the churches together to have a similar conversation.

**Action:** Explore the possibility of creating open discussion between the youth of our churches through the Feast programme – **By Whom:** Ulrike Hunt to lead and include Dr Trevor Adams and Pastor Margaret Seaton.

Peter Adams did research that showed that the Crawley family from Stockwood were the biggest landowners in Luton. They have a long association with St Mary’s church. In the mid 1700’s they had two plantations in the Caribbean. They also received the benefits of reparations. From 1860 onward, St Mary’s was conceivably a benefactor of financial support from the family during substantial renovations. During this period a number of C of E churches were built with considerable input from the Crawley family, including St Paul’s (where NTCG meet), All Saints, St Matthew’s, St Luke’s and a couple of others.

Peter has passed this information on to the leadership of St Mary’s, so that they can see what they can do as a church with their own relationships.

**Action:** Information to be passed to the Bishop of Bedford, the Rt Revd Richard Atkinson for serious considerations. The suggestion of transfers of redundant church buildings instead of selling them will be raised. **By whom:** Peter Adams.

Dr Trevor Adams said education is a big issue, so investing in the education of black children would be a step forward. He said that at senior levels within the Church of England there have been conversations about how to make restitution. Locally, education is an area of need but note that the education system is a part of the problem. It excludes black history, the civil rights movement in the UK. Black people still suffer the devastation of the transatlantic slave trade and its oppression. What will we do to set the captives free? What can we do to speak truth to the chains that hold people bound? Can we imagine the message it sends about God’s love when the community see the black churches and the mainstream white churches working together?

**Action:** Set up a meeting with the Diocesan Director of Education responsible for some 200 schools in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. **By whom:** Peter Adams to include Dr Trevor Adams and Lorna Markland from the African Caribbean Community Development Forum.

**Action:** Set up a meeting via the Headteacher of Cardinal Newman School with the six Catholic Primary heads. **By whom:** Dr Trevor Adams/Monsignor McGinnell.

**Action:** Send out diversity questionnaire to church leaders. **By Whom:** CTL

**Action:** To be tabled for a future meeting, invite bank managers, money lenders, police officers, employers, and university leaders to join the conversation with the aim of achieving a more wide-ranging transformation. **By whom:** CTL & BTN

Dr Trevor Adams invited CTL to be involved in a planned Employability Day for black children and their parents in 2021.

**Action:** Date to be provided. **By whom:** Dr Trevor Adams

**Date of next meeting:** First week of December 2020. **Action:** Day to be confirmed. **By whom:** Sue Penn

**Closing Remarks**

Vincent Cox encouraged those present to invite their colleagues to the next meeting and let them know we are not just a talking shop, but action and collaborations are taking place.

Pastor David Lewin closed the meeting in prayer.

**Final thought:** Vincent Cox said that the Apostle Paul spent much of his time not talking about denominations or being Christian, but he talked about being ‘In Christ’. We are ‘In Christ’ and we will show the world that we are all ‘in Christ’ together.

Meeting closed at 8:38 pm.