

The Official Publication of The Church of England Guild of Vergers

September 2006

As previously reported, our venue of C many years – Newman College, Bartley s Green, Birmingham – was not available for this year's Annual Training us Conference. After much research, a enquiries, and availability, All Saints the Pastoral Centre, London Colney (in the we Diocese of Westminster) was secured for the week of 5th – 9th June 2006; our grateful thanks to Tom Cameron (Guild C Training Officer) and his Team for we bringing this to fruition.

What a beneficial decision this proved to be and although some adjustments and compromises were necessary, overall, the facilities proved to be a great success (assisted by glorious weather).

All Saints was built by Leonard Stokes in 1901 as a convent for the All Saints Sisters and subsequently acquired by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster in 1973. The main part of the centre is built around a quadrangle garden, (where many an hour was spent in groups or individually but not always in silence!), with an inner cloister leading to those rooms in which our meetings and lectures were held. The bedrooms and other facilities were above and in the Albury House annex. The dining room and kitchens were on the ground floor on the south side and the food quality and selection suited the majority - special requirements were catered for where possible.

The Comper Chapel (designed by Ninian Comper) is to the north side of the complex; the first stage was completed in 1927 and the second stage in 1963 by Comper's son, Sabastian. Although now showing signs of wear and tear, and needing some TLC, we had virtually sole use of the Chapel and much was achieved therein throughout the week, thus restoring an important aspect to the week's activities which many had felt had been lost at Newman College (for a number of reasons). The separate Oratory was used as an alternative venue for worship.

enue

And how many of those attending undertook the prayer walk? The guide, some found, was a little confusing but those who managed to find the route were impressed by the diversity of plant and wildlife – it was suggested that the rabbit population far outnumbered the humans in residence!

Have the Guild found a new home for the years to come (definitely for 2007) – time will tell? "The Annual Conference is an opportunity for vergers (and others) to come together, to learn, to pray, to relax, have fun and enjoy the fellowship of mixing with others ... " – most who attended would say this has been achieved.

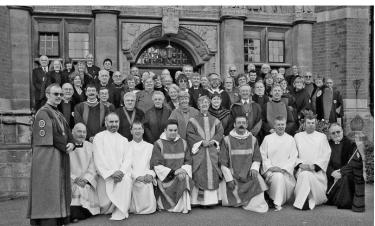


Conference Supplemen

Founded 1932. Presidents: The Archbishops of Canterbury and York

Was Silence Golden?

What do you call a collection of Vergers? was recently asked that by a retired priest at training the conference for the vergers at conference centre at London Colney, well I suppose it could be a 'Gabble' because there was certainly a lot of talking going on when nearly 90



Photograph by courtesy of Stephen Haude

vergers are gathered together for a whole week.

It all started on Sunday, with people arriving, rooms sorted out, and after cases were unpacked, we went for our evening meal and meeting up with old friends; then on to the Central Council meeting (my first as a new Area Leader).

Monday dawned with Mattins, then breakfast, more arrivals and the Guild AGM followed by lunch and after, our first speaker of the week, Reverend Keith Beech-Gruneberg talking about "Blessings". We then robed and made our way to the Chapel for a Solemn Eucharist, followed by the taking of the conference photo with the usual mayhem in getting us into some form of order. We had a lovely evening meal which was followed by an 'at home' where everyone gets to know each other, especially first time visitors; this always seems to take place in the bar!!!!!

Tuesday arrived after a not very good night because of noise from the nearby motorway. Mattins again before breakfast then singing practise for those who felt 'called' to rehearse the Faure` Requiem (to be sung at the Solemn Requiem that afternoon). This was followed by Simon Watney telling us about church monuments, mid-day prayers and lunch. Suitably refreshed and having a break, we went to a film show, then our Solemn Eucharist. The evening found us (in the bar again) for a quiz evening with our local branch making up a team and calling ourselves 'the secretary's scholars' (as he was in our team we did quite well not bottom but not far off), not sure the marks were counted properly.

Wednesday found us at an instructed Eucharist explained by our training officer, with a break for

coffee at the Peace, which everyone thought a good idea to take back to our own churches. After lunch we boarded a coach for an afternoon in St Albans, with sung evensong at the Cathedral, then back to the centre for dinner finishing the evening with Compline by candlelight.

Thursday was a really early start for me, as I

was up, robed and in Chapel by 7.30am having been asked to read one of the lessons at the Eucharist. After breakfast, there were workshops, six in all, but time only allowed attendance at two with a coffee break in between. There followed midday prayers, then lunch. In the afternoon we heard about the care of gold, silver and precious objects by Mrs Wickham - Treasury Archivist at Guildford Cathedral. Then followed Evensong and Benediction - this was a very moving service.

Friday dawned, our last day; Mattins at 8.00am, breakfast, then we gathered for thoughts on this conference and looking forward to next year's event. We all robed and went to Solemn Eucharist (with the help of a fire incident to spur us along too much holy smoke in the vestry!) taken by the Guild Chaplain, Canon Maureen. Her sermon was about Columba and being on a beach. Maureen had bought a bowl of small pebbles, and we were told to each take two and put one in the basket with all our concerns and to take the other out into our daily lives.

All too soon it was lunch and time to say our goodbyes to friends, all looking forward to meeting up again next year. All in all a really lovely, fulfilling and relaxing but busy week.

Margaret Burston Area Leader Gloucester, Hereford & Worcester Branch (Based on an article written for her Parish Magazine)

Conference Programme 2006

Our day 4th	40.00hm	Devictoria
Sunday 4 th	16.00hrs 18.00hrs	Registration Central Council Dinner
	19.30hrs	Central Council Meeting
	19.301115	Central Council Meeting
Monday 5 th	08.00hrs	Mattins
	08.30hrs	Breakfast
	09.30hrs	Registration continues
	11.30hrs	Guild AGM
	13.00hrs	Lunch
	14.30hrs	Guest speaker – "Blessings": The Reverend Keith Beech-Gruneberg
	16.45hrs	Guild congregation
	17.00hrs	Solemn Eucharist: President and preacher – The Chaplain
	11.001110	Conference photo will be taken after the Eucharist
	18.30hrs	Dinner and "At Home"
Tuesday 6 th	08.00hrs	Mattins
	08.30hrs	Breakfast
	09.30hrs	Getting to know you and singing practice
	10.30hrs	"Church Monuments": Simon Watney, Church Monuments Society
	12.30hrs	Midday prayers
	13.00hrs	Lunch
	14.30hrs	"La Chocolate"
	17.00hrs	Solemn Requiem: President – The Chaplain
	18.30hrs	Dinner
	20.00hrs	Inter-branch quiz night
Wednesday 7 th	08.00hrs	Mattins
	08.30hrs	Breakfast
	10.03hrs	An instructed Eucharist: President – The Chaplain
	12.30hrs	Midday prayers
	13.00hrs	Lunch
	14.00hrs	Board coaches for afternoon outing
	14.00110	Free time in St Albans
	17.00hrs	Sung Evensong (girls' voices) at St Albans Abbey
	17.00113	Board coaches immediately afterwards
	18.30hrs	Diana coaches inimediately anelwards Dinner
	20.00hrs	Compline by candlelight
Thursday 8 th	07.45hrs	Eucharist: President – Father James
	08.30hrs	Breakfast
	10.00hrs	Workshops and master classes
	11.30hrs	Repeats of workshops
	12.30hrs	Midday prayers
	13.00hrs	Lunch
	14.30hrs	"Care of Gold and Silver and Precious Objects": Mrs A Wickham, Treasury Archivist, Guildford Cathedral
	17.00hrs	Evensong and Benediction
	18.30hrs	Dinner
	19.30hrs	Stations of the Cross
Friday 9 th	08.00hrs	Mattins
	08.30hrs	Breakfast
	09.30hrs	Yours thoughts on this and next year's conference
	10.30hrs	Solemn Eucharist: President and preacher – The Chaplain
	10.00110	Lunch and departures
s	ubject to subseaue	ent adjustments/amendments as changing circumstances evolved.
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Sermons given by Canon Maureen Palmer, National Chaplain

OPENING EUCHARIST (Guild Congregation)

Harry, aged eight, asked what he knew about the Holy Spirit said, "He's like a genie in a bottle. Once you let him out, you don't know what he might lead you to do." The events of Pentecost, as told by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, is very dramatic and not too far from Harry's conception of his work. It seemed to be the fulfillment of prophecy. There was the rush of a mighty wind; tongues of fire resting on each of the disciples, but most spectacular of all, these frightened rabbits of men (and women) were given new strength of purpose and they went out into the market place to preach boldly, and everyone who listened to them, heard the message in his/her own language. The message, a continuation of the work of Christ, was to tell of the mighty acts of God. The prophets had dreamed of such an occasion when the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, sons and daughters would prophesy, old men would dream dreams, young men would see visions.

The disciples had seen Jesus die on the cross, they had been excited by the appearances of the risen Jesus and in some sense, they felt he had never left them. However, the time came that they had to let go and continue his work and mission themselves. They had to let go, grow up and move on. Had they clung to Jesus, they would have clung to an image – a pathetic replica of who Jesus might have been, but in fact was not. So Jesus says, if you let me go, I will send you the Spirit, the parakletos, who will guide you in your growing up, give you life and shine through you into the cosmos. The implication in both Acts and John is that the sending of the parakletos is the means whereby the Lord himself returns to them, to the glory of the Father.

Jesus knew that if the disciples were to be enabled to continue his work they would need a Helper, a Counsellor, a Comforter and an Advocate. The word John uses is parakletos, which means all of these things. At the end of the Gospel of John there is no Ascension and no Pentecost narrative such as we read in the Acts. Instead Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' The bestowal of the Spirit uses the imagery of the Old Testament of wind or breath signifying life. The Spirit also gives the disciples a great responsibility and authority, 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

The mission of the Spirit is far-reaching:

- He will in-dwell the disciples
- He will teach for he is the Spirit of truth
- He will recall for the disciples the words of Jesus

He will witness to Christ and thereby enable the disciples to witness to Christ

He will convict the world

• He will declare to the disciples the things that are coming and glorify Christ by taking the things that are of Christ and declaring them to the disciples.

Of this list, only John speaks about the conviction of the world, which will be the ongoing work of Christ. The Spirit will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgement but because the world cannot bear the truth, the world will hate the message that the disciples will bring. John then goes on to explain the conviction of the world. The world is convicted of sin because the Jews thought that sin was breaking the law, but much of Jesus teaching suggested that one could keep the letter of the law and obey the rules, without entering into the spirit of what was laid down. This is acting a lie and so the actual sin was the pretence of outwardly keeping the law, but inwardly, straying far from it. So the world is guilty of sin because they have not believed the words of Jesus and are self-centred rather than God-centred. The same argument can be used of the conviction of righteousness. The Jews thought they were righteous if they kept the law, but now they are confronted by Jesus, who is truly righteous and they see their own faults; they are found wanting, and so they turn defensive, turn against Jesus and crucify him. The world thought it had justice on its side but the vindication is Jesus: God has decided in favour of Jesus, the wholly righteous one. The Jews truly believed that Judgement would be meted out at the end of the age and that the righteous would go into everlasting felicity and the bad into everlasting damnation. The division was expected upon the ability of a person to keep the law. Judgement was dispensed through the courts of the powerful, and the religious hierarchy decided who, in their opinion, was righteous or doomed. Now they are confronted with the truth that the whole order is being judged. Power cannot transform lives, only love is transforming and love was rejected. The world supposed it could pass judgement on Jesus and on his disciples, but the events of Jesus' death and resurrection indicate that they are wrong. Thus John's Gospel speaks of the Holy Spirit as proving the world in the wrong. The difference is that God's people in the lawsuit are followers of Jesus. The doomed people are those who refuse to recognize love, those who refuse to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. So Jesus says, the disciples are bound to be sad and anxious because of the persecution that will follow their stand for the truth, but the parakletos will comfort and help them.

When we pray 'Come, Holy Spirit,' we must be ready for that prayer to be answered. The Holy Spirit's indwelling does not make for an easy life, for triumph or for success: he will lead us to serve knowing that sometimes we will fail and learn by our failure. He may take us through loneliness, through the desert where we feel, like Jesus, 'My God, my God, why





Directory Supplement Of Guild and Branch Officers and Committees Fellows and Life Members Overseas Affiliations

For detachment and separate use as required and to be used in conjunction with the main Guild Directory (shortly to be updated)

September 2006

The General Secretary is to be notified of any amendments or changes to the information contained herein.

Report from the Committee Meetings held at Conference

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the new venue, All Saints Pastoral Centre, and wished us a successful conference. He reminded us that since we last met we had sent Father Bill and Christine on their Mediterranean cruise, but sadly we were all shocked to hear of Father Bill's untimely death on the 14th March, this year.

In order to honour Michael Giller on his retirement as National Treasurer, we supported a project dear to his heart – the Barsham Organ Appeal. Michael Golby went, on our behalf, to see the organ dedicated and a plaque put in position with our name on it. Michael Giller was extremely pleased especially as this was all done without his knowledge; subterfuge and the secret service went into action once again.

Chris attended the inauguration of the Archbishop of York, representing the Guild, along with Clive McCleester.

The National Treasurer presented the accounts to the Central Council which were accepted by the meeting.

The Standing Committee met in January and had accepted an offer by Dr Simon Linley, the organist of Leeds Parish Church, to set the Vergers Prayer to music. This is his gift to us for our anniversary next year.

The new Cope for Canon Maureen has been paid for from the funeral donations for Louise Lee and is now being kept at Hereford. The legacy (of £10,000) left to us by Louise has now been received and is in our bank; we are extremely grateful to Louise for her gift. A form, to be used by members wishing to leave a legacy to the Guild, is being prepared and will be available shortly.

Amendments to the Guild Constitution were proposed and accepted; confirmation in a format suitable for insertion in the current Constitution booklet is being prepared and will be available via branch secretaries in early course.

Various officers were due for election or re-election and the following were confirmed:

Canterbury representative – Tom Cameron York representative – Doreen Cook Chronicler – James Armstrong Conference Secretary – Richard Falla Liaison Officer – Dee Caulton-Ball Training Officer – Tom Cameron Training Registrar – John Shearer Welfare Officer – Michael Golby

The Central Committee realised that whilst we had conferred a Life Membership on Raymond Fowler, we had omitted to present him with the usual glass memento – this will be rectified and presented to him in Hereford Cathedral shortly. Another long serving member, Bill Groves, who is already a Life Member, is to be honoured with a Fellowship for his dedication to the Guild.

There was much to discuss about the rally for 2007 to take place on the 5th September at St Paul's Cathedral and more detailed information will be available soon. Other venues have been offered for future years.

The next meeting of the Standing Committee will be on the 11th September at Exeter. The Central Council will meet on the 19th October in London, and the conference and AGM will be at All Saints Pastoral Centre, commencing on the 4th June 2007.

Jeanne Scott, National General Secretary

have you forsaken me?' He may drive us into the wilderness to be tempted. He may lift the corner of the veil between heaven and earth and reveal himself to us. He may lead us to Calvary. Whatever elation we feel by being filled with the Spirit, we know that the Spirit can only work in a God-centred life, and that when our lives revert to self-centredness, the Spirit sighs and waits eagerly for our renewed conversion. Amen

HOMILY FOR THE REQUIEM MASS

I wonder what you understand by death? One image to which I have returned time and again is that of the death of the rabbit, Hazel, in "Watership Down" by Richard Adams. Let me read you a slightly abridged version of the end of the story.

One chilly, blustery morning in March, Hazel was dozing and waking in his burrow. He had spent a good deal of time there lately, for he felt the cold and could not seem to smell and run so well as in days gone by. He had been dreaming in a confused way – something about rain and elder bloom – when he woke to realize that there was a rabbit lying quietly beside him. He raised his head and said, 'Do you want to talk to me?'

'Yes, that's what I've come for,' replied the other. 'You know me, don't you?'

'Yes, of course,' said Hazel, hoping that he would be able to remember the name in a moment. Then he saw that in the darkness of the burrow, the stranger's ears were shining with a faint silver light. 'Yes, my Lord,' he said. Yes, I know you.'

'You've been feeling tired,' said the stranger, 'but I can do something about that. I've come to ask you to join my Owsla. If you're ready, we might go along now.'

The sun was shining and in spite of the cold there were a few bucks and does nibbling the shoots of spring grass. It seemed to Hazel that he would not be needing his body any more, so he left it lying on the edge of the ditch, but stopped for a moment to watch the rabbits and to try to get used to the extraordinary feeling that strength and speed were flowing inexhaustibly out of him into their sleek young bodies and healthy senses.

The stranger reached the top of the bank in a single powerful leap. Hazel followed; and together they slipped away, running easily down through the wood, where the first primroses were beginning to bloom.

Death is not just a closure, but rather an adventure into something new. At a Requiem we have the opportunity to look back to those we have loved, and to express an amazing number of emotions. There is the thanksgiving for the life, the friendship, the love between us; there may be anger at what we perceived to be poor care or unnecessary suffering; there is the sadness at our own loss and above all, there is the hope of resurrection. But death so rarely affects just one person, usually it will involve not just the family but also the community of work, of leisure, of neighbours and for each group there will be the mingling of sadness and joy. So the Requiem is the opportunity to join our prayers with those of the saints of every age and place: as indeed we do in every Eucharist.

As Christian people, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are constitutive of what it means to be a human being – to live, to die and to be raised with Christ. We live and die in dependence on God and resurrection is God's answer to death. But in one sense that does not take away our anxiety. We know ourselves and God knows us intimately but no other human being knows everything about us. God knows us, and yet we have only dim images of him through the love of Jesus, and through the love which others give us. Paul tries to help us when he says, 'Now we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face.' Resurrection is the act of God whereby the life we own is made whole in a new dimension of life and love. Yet, most of us cannot envisage what the resurrection life might be like.

In the book "War and Peace", Tolstoy muses about the meaning of death and life. Prince Andrey is about to die and he says:

'Love? What is love?'

'Love hinders death. Love is life. All that I understand, I understand only because I love. All is, all exists only because I love. All is bound up in love alone. Love is God, and dying means for me, a particle of love, to go back to the universal and eternal source of love.'

'Yes, death is an awakening,' flashed with sudden light into his soul, the veil that had hidden the unknown was lifted before his spiritual vision. He felt free ... Amen.

FINAL EUCHARIST

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Columba, one who through his life brought the faith from Ireland to Scotland, and one who was immensely influential in the development of sprituality. Celtic spirituality had its roots in the pagan religions of Ireland and Wales, so, not surprisingly, its conception of God, of Jesus and of the Trinity was somewhat different from the Christians of the Western Church who looked to Rome for their guidance. There is so much that we can learn from Columba.

First, the Celtic Christians saw God as present in the whole of his creation, in the physical elements of earth, rock, water, plants, trees and animals, even in the different weather patterns. This is very different from the traditional Western view that God is a transcendent, omnipotent Being, remote from the world. God is also recognized in all the daily tasks of life, however menial these may seem. So there are prayers for rising in the morning, milking the cow, kindling the fire etc. Nothing was too trivial not to be sanctified by prayer. This view of God is very Scriptural – think of Psalms that speak of 'trees clapping their hands and mountains skipping like rams'. For the Celtic Christians 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God'.

Second, Jesus is recognized as the Son of God, and the natural world is charged with sparks of divine presence and reflects the glory of a Cosmic Christ. The Celtic Christians subscribed to a 'Natural Theology' in which they contemplated the beauty and order of the universe. We have to some extent recovered this theology in our own time as astronomers and physicists have made us aware of the beauty and mysterious nature of the extremities of space and the 'heart' of matter.

Thirdly, was the view of the work of Christ:

one view would be to accept the Biblical story of the Fall and the concept of original sin and see the work of Christ as being our salvation from sin and its terrible consequences. This was the view of Western Christendom who were preoccupied with sin and therefore guilt.

the second view holds a more positive attitude to the world and to the human condition so that we are not seen as tainted by sin, but rather as being immature and incomplete, so the work of Christ is to perfect creation and lift it to God. The Celtic Church subscribed to a creation-centred spirituality.

For Columba human beings were imprinted with the image of God, full of potential and opportunity and longing to be whole and perfect. The Greek Fathers had a strong sense of kinship with God and suggested that the divine spark was kindled in every human life at birth, and although dimmed by sin, it was never extinguished. Human beings are also destined to share fellowship with God and there was the sense that all human beings are striving for union with God. In addition to the influence of the Greek Fathers, the Celtic Christians had the positive view of human beings since they so often lived at the margins of society and were frequently under threat. So Jesus was perceived as the Liberator and Enabler rather than the Judge and Reprover. Salvation was a matter of co-operation between nature and grace and atonement liberating the essential good from the bondage to evil. Jesus is the one who draws us into 'the alorious liberty of the children of God'. The great standing crosses witness to the battles between Christ and the devil – Christ the victor over death, sin and evil. Columba was very aware of the reality of the power of evil and of sin but these were regarded as external forces rather than as innate features of the inner nature of human beings. This view of the work of Christ does not negate the sacrifice of the cross, but the cross becomes a glorious, if terrible, mystery which symbolizes life coming out of death and wholeness out of suffering. The kenosis, or self-emptying, of Jesus was the image of life for all Christians.

Fourthly, the Celtic Church recognized that the separation between earth and heaven was a very narrow one, a thin veil and this gave them a closeness to the dead. They would have been very much at ease with the 'near-death experience' as a positive manifestation of that thin veil. Any who have had such an experience are changed by it and thereafter do not fear death either for themselves or for those they love. The overwhelming sense of God's presence and the glorious company of angels and archangels and saints reinforced the doctrine of the resurrection to eternal life and also linked it to the stories of Jesus casting out

demons and the saying of Paul that:

'For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.'

Fifthly, for Columba the Church was not a 'structure' – he had no sense or taste for organization and it saw the faith through communities which were essentially temporal and provisional. Places of worship were usually wattle and daub huts and monks and pilgrims moved from place to place so that 'Church' was the gathered community. Columba did build a monastery but it was probably a collection of small huts from which the monks could sally forth to retreat to more remote places. The monks were not so much concerned with evangelism as with incorporating the outsiders into the Christian fold, seeing them as 'friends and strangers' and seeking to discover the Christ who is already there in all his richness.'

Lastly, one of the characteristics of the Celtic Church was 'peregrinatio' - pilgrimage for Christ. Christians of the time were convinced that they should be perpetual pilgrims, in a state of exile from the comfort and distraction of daily life. Although Columba made his pilgrimage and then remained on Iona, only taking short breaks away, he was atypical. The Biblical basis for pilgrimage comes from the stories of Abraham and Moses, both of whom left the familiar to journey, they knew not where. Jesus also commanded his disciples 'Follow me'. To one who was reluctant he said, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air nests: but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' [Matthew 8 : 20] The Celtic pilgrims were not looking for a land of milk and honey but for barren, isolated places where they could pray and live before moving on again. The physical pilgrimage released and reflected the inner pilgrimage where a journey of repentance, forgiveness, resurrection and renewal brings us close to our own centre and thereby helps to bring us into union with God. The Celtic decoration of intertwining ribbons and curving spirals of knots, has much to say about this constant pilgrimage, this constant feeling of journeying on. Each pattern has many twists and turns but it seems purposeful and complete.

If you go to the island of Iona, and visit St. Columba's Bay – the place where Columba probably landed in his coracle with twelve monks, a large number of books and some provisions, you are invited to pray and then to pick up two pebbles. One pebble you are invited to throw into the sea to symbolize those things in your life which you would like to lose, the second pebble you put in your pocket to remind you of Columba and his pilgrimage, and the pilgrimage of the inner life that we all make. We cannot simulate the sea, but there is a dish of small pebbles. I invite you now to take two: one to discard into the bowl on the altar, the second to keep as you return to your own place to remind you of your inner pilgrimage. Amen.



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The chosen charity for this year's conference was CAFOD to which all monies collected through various sources was contributed.

Thank you



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A transcript of Tom Cameron's "An Instructed Eucharist" (given on Wednesday morning) can be obtained directly from Tom upon request.

of А list those attending this year's conference is lodged with the General Secretary; anyone requiring information relating to said list, please approach Jeanne stating the nature of your request.



Training Conference 2007

Next year's National Training Conference will be held at All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney, 4th June - 8th June 2006. Fuller details in the December issue.