

Faith Workers



NEWSLETTER • Winter 2009

'Doing our bit for the Branch – or three steps to organising'

One of the great things about our Branch is that there are lots of ways; that we as members can get involved. It is sometimes forgotten that the 'union' is us. That is, no matter how great our professional staff; or the skills and expertise offered by King Street, in the end, it's what we do that matters. So, if you forgive the paraphrasing of Kennedy; ask not what the union has done for you, but what have you done for the union?

The organising agenda

This is where the organising agenda comes in. I know that sometimes trade unions can use terms which aren't always clear; so when we talk about the 'organising agenda', what we mean is our ability to recruit, retain, activate and develop our membership. Why is this important? Because, the more of us who get involved, get trained, do things, the better we can support each other in times of difficulty; and in the end isn't that what both ministry and trade unionism is all about?

So what I'd like to do in this short piece is to give three simple examples of what each of us, every member, can do to help us grow our union. And, by the way, I write as a member, a church minister, and long-time trade unionist, who simply believes, that this is important. I got involved as I think ministry should be honoured and affirmed. Doing our bit for Unite Faith Workers, is a good way of doing just that. Looking after people, who spend their lives looking after others!

The first thing: talk about Unite Faith Workers

It's up to us to raise the profile of our Branch with colleagues and friends. Remind those in ministry that joining Unite Faith Workers is a concrete expression of our desire to support friends and colleagues in times of difficulty. Unite offer first-class support, a help line, free legal advice (after six months' membership), but also a wonderful network of friends and colleagues, opportunities to share good practise, to access meaningful professional development, to enjoy

fellowship. And even to have fun! And, as well as this, our Branch is dogged in its determination to secure appropriate employment rights; after all, Chaplains often already have them – and no-one suggests that their service to God and others is diminished. So, please talk about our Union; celebrate our successes!

The second thing: carry membership forms on your person

Okay, at least have them in your briefcase (or whatever the equivalent is). This is not a hard thing to do. I have a few forms next to my sermons/orders of service in my 'church' bag. If the conversation comes up, and someone says, 'Well, I wouldn't mind joining'; then you can say, 'Great, here's a form – fill it in now, and I'll send it off for you'. The wonderful staff at King Street can get you forms (or email me on cjwilson63@aol.com and I'll get you some). It's a small thing really, a small gesture, but that person you recruit might be very grateful later in life for this simple act of being prepared.

The third thing: send an email

We live in an electronic age. For membership as dispersed as ours, email is often the way we communicate. Please talk about/introduce Unite Faith Workers over the email. I can help here as well, as I have some model emails; complete with electronic inks to the Unite Faith Workers Branch, membership forms, and subscriptions rates, pre-prepared (just drop me an email, address above). All you have to do is to adapt as suits, decide who to send it to, and click and send. I can't stress enough its simply about giving people the option and encouragement to join; not because anyone is on commission (I'm not!), but because this really is the best way to show that we are serious when we say that ministry should be honoured and affirmed. Sometimes, and sadly, institutional faith structures can get it wrong. When that happens, let us make sure that Unite Faith Workers is there to help. So please, let's all do our bit – and remember the Union is you and me, us, together!

Chris Wilson Branch Executive Committee member

Faith Workers Help Line 0845 108 2575 or faithworkers@unitetheunion.org

Join Unite the Union online at www.unitetheunion.org

Branch meets in south west – a first

The first meeting of branch members in the south west region took place on 10 November, in the Taunton district office, which is close to the Taunton junction on the M5 motorway, and so reasonably accessible for members in the area. It was a very grey, wet and windy day, but the poor weather conditions didn't dampen the spirits of those who came, and we enjoyed sharing with each other, swapping stories, finding out more about the branch and the union, thanks to Dorothy Fogg, regional officer, learning how the church operates in our different areas and making suggestions for the future. I shared something about the work of an area rep, as did Peter Bellenes.

If you are a Faith Workers Branch member in the south west of England you should have received an invitation. If you didn't, then we probably have an out of date address for you, or perhaps you have joined recently and so your details haven't got onto our database yet. I realised our database was quite out of date when a number of the letters I sent out were returned unopened by the Post Office. Originally, I was going to email members in the region, but then I reconsidered and sent letters by post, thinking that the email addresses were probably even more out of date than the postal addresses.

In our discussions, a number of topics were raised which we agreed to follow up. The first was the issue of housing and its maintenance. There seems to be quite a variation in the treatment of clergy housing.

We thought it would be a good idea to compile a questionnaire to see what members are expecting of a quinquennial inspection. For example, we heard that in one diocese there had been a specific project to provide cavity wall insulation, where suitable, whereas in another the very idea of cavity wall insulation received the thumbs down. Another area of concern was that of bullying and harassment. Quite a few cases of clergy stress were referred to, as a result of harassment and bullying. Although churches might notionally subscribe to 'Dignity at Work', the practice was often different from the theory. A third area mentioned was that of training; it seems that the funds available for ministerial training and development varies considerably from church to church. It was felt some research could be done and a view developed with in the branch as to the amount and type of training that could reasonably be expected. A fourth concern was the ministerial review process being rolled out at present, and associated with Common Tenure and Clergy Terms of Service. The parameters for the ministerial review seemed to vary across the region, although the ministerial review process was not fully in place.

South west members are hoping to meet again in the Spring, so if you missed out this time, do get in touch, preferably with an email address so that you can be kept up to date with news and dates.

Colin Lunt Branch Publicity Officer

Transforming Church Conflict

'Transforming Church Conflict' was the title of a course I went on recently, run by Bridge Builders, which operates out of the London Mennonite Centre. I have to say that it was a very well-run course, very involving and profoundly moving. By varying the pace, location (some of it took place out of doors), and the type of work – lectures, group work, exercises, role-playing – the course never flagged in providing stimulating ideas and furthering the learning process. I feel I have come away with several new ideas and techniques to try. I was with a friendly and supportive bunch of people from a range of denominations. The manual that was handed out at the course amounted to 132 pages and there was a bookstall with many items on it in the area of conflict management, team building, and spiritual, psychological and social aspects of working together in church. This was an introductory course, Bridge Builders runs follow up courses too; there is also a Bridge Builders Network one can join, to keep in touch, and also receive discount on further courses.

I personally found the course very helpful, and think it would benefit union reps or anyone involved in negotiation or mediation. The week long course (£750 or £650 for early booking) was paid for from my diocesan grant for continuing ministerial development – up to now ministers in my diocese have been able to accumulate funding for up to three years from this grant, based as it is on 1% of stipend. However, I have recently received an e-mail from the diocese stating that, as from next year, this grant must be used the same year and not be carried over. I shall be responding to this information, as applying this rule would make it impossible to do any week long residential course within the budget.

I wonder what happens in other churches. Perhaps there are guidelines on the number of days training for each minister. Do write in if you have any thoughts on this.

Colin Lunt Branch Publicity Officer

Letter from the Chair

Green issues dominate the world agendas – suddenly opinion and concerns have run the green way. Initially they were thought about but now everywhere we turn they are before us in one shape or another. Change of opinion can happen very suddenly and dramatically. We likewise are in changing times...

More cases and well-trained representatives

As a Faith Worker I have experienced huge changes in our situation – on the one hand we are dealing with more cases than ever before and experiencing issues that most non Faith people cannot conceive would ever happen in such organisations. I refer to such things as bullying and harassment and also as result of various expectations – serious stress.

Sadly many Faith Workers especially ministers are being invalidated out – taking early retirement or going off to work in a totally different area. These are people who once felt a call on their lives and often gave up much to pursue it. A shameful way to treat such people and a tragic waste of resources as well.

On the other hand we as a branch have well trained Accredited Representatives to assist and support these members. We can feel justifiably proud of this and while you read this perhaps you may like to consider whether you could help other members in their hours of need. Just drop a mail to our officer concerned [Terry Young – t.j.young@talktalk.net] or myself and we can let you know what to do next. An expression of interest does not obligate you to attend – we hold taster days so that you can do just that: taste and see first.

In addition, the branch is operating efficiently and we are ensuring that each area of endeavour is covered by two people so there is the beginnings of a team activity in each area. Each area of endeavour needs a team to achieve the hopes we have. Again, if you feel inclined to help your colleagues, do give me a call and we can talk about ideas and possibilities – again, investigation is not obligation, so rest easy and reach for the phone!

Employment status

And thirdly, I sense we are close to a breakthrough – one we have all been longing to see. In the not too distant future I am sure we will at last obtain the beginnings of the cover of full employment legislation for all ministers of religion. I use these terms so as to show we do not want to eliminate or finish with the office holder status. What we want is the full cover of the law as it applies to all others who work and pay

their taxes and National Insurance contributions through the same system as Minister/Office Holders do currently. Most Faith Bodies say they offer the Section 23 rights already – but do not want to bow to employment law totally, as that would provide a direct right of appeal to tribunals and the independent judgement of others, when the internal systems that on the whole are massively stacked against ministers, fail them.

Faith leaders have powers, sometimes used unfairly, when problems come up. Usually, ministers only discover this at that point, so are totally unprepared for such an eventuality. Even today long and faithfully serving ministers are being shown the door for no real reason save that the organisation wants to dispose of their services. I sense that the sort of gross unfairness in such cases will eventually lead to us achieving the goal we have sought for so long.

Our base goal is the proper cover of Health and Safety Legislation so that it should apply to all employees. It is a shock to find out you may be to blame for answering your front door and suffering an assault as result of that.

Although you may have no input into your property's defences you may well be regarded as the responsible person. When these events happen there are lots of expressions of dismay and condolences by the chiefs, but no actions to deal with the real issue – they should be responsible and take actions to minimize such risks.

We also expect the cover of full employment law – with full rights of appeal; something not offered to any office holder by any Faith Body.

Better treatment under the law

Our ultimate aims may be in sight. We want to interact with Faith Bodies widely to ensure that the 'employees' they have, are treated even better than the law requires. They should be treated in such a way that those relationships will be the envy of all and a model that others will want to aspire to. This means leading the field incarnationally, rather than seeking to avoid real responsibility.

So members, is this just a wild aspiration or are we truly 'Prisoners of Hope'? That was the Faith call to all, leading to South African independence. Let's aspire to that being our call as I believe I hear the 'sound of marching' already. True justice is the attribute of Deity built in to who we

Gerry Barlow Branch Chair

Pensions: risk at retirement

Pensions have been in the news over recent months. They generally fall into two broad categories – defined benefit and defined contribution.

Defined benefit, often called final salary, schemes guarantee a certain level of benefit according to how long you have worked for the employer and the pay you are receiving when you retire.

Defined contribution schemes specify how much money will be paid each year into a "pension pot". What the beneficiary receives depends on how the value of the pot has fared over the years and what pension that will buy on retirement.

The defined benefit schemes (which include most of those for church workers) generally have a Fund with trustees representing the employer and the employees.

At least once every three years the amount held in the Fund, and the form in which it is held, is assessed against the expected liabilities – the pensions already earned even if they are not yet being paid.

The recession means that most Funds do not currently have enough in so plans have to be drawn up to close the gap over a reasonable period. Pensions due for past service cannot be changed so the gap has to be closed by changing the basis for accruing benefits in the future and/or increasing the contribution rate.

Benefits and expectations

Church pension funds have not been exempt from this general problem, one which has led many employers to close their defined benefit schemes to new entrants or for all future service.

This means that the members of such schemes are no longer guaranteed a certain level of benefits when they retire. Since ministers generally receive accommodation as part of their terms and conditions this means they have to find somewhere else to live when they retire. Uncertainty over how much they will receive by way of pension does not help planning for this.

Some pension funds may guarantee housing, but this will affect how much they will have available for paying pensions. In at least one case the rules have been changed in recent years so some ministers who thought they would receive help with housing on retirement now find that they will not have put in enough years of service to get this important benefit.

The trustees' responsibility to be prudent in their decisions is important and has to be recognized. However ministers' reasonable expectations are also important. Worry over such matters does not help effective ministry.

The Church of England scheme

The Church of England's Clergy Pension Scheme affects the highest number of ministers and has perhaps suffered more than most because it is a young scheme, started in 1998 with pensions accrued before then being paid by the Church Commissioners.

The valuation at the end of 2006 showed a large deficit and a plan was devised and implemented to address this. The economic situation since then has meant that rather than the gap closing it has widened sharply. That is why they have been consulting over further changes to the Scheme.

One of the constraints they have to work with is the ability of local churches to fund the scheme. Consultations with the dioceses have indicated that without changes to entitlement they would not be able to make the necessary contributions, most of the necessary rise being to cover the deficit that has built up. A delegation from Unite met with Shaun Farrell, Chief Executive of the Pensions Board, and two of his colleagues to discuss our concerns.

It seemed as if there was a marked wariness among the Pensions Board representatives at the meeting, which was unfortunate. We presented our concerns that clergy want assurance about the level of benefits they would receive, something a defined contribution scheme cannot offer with the unpredictability of how much a given sum of money will bring by way of annual pension. His real concern did not seem to register with the Pensions Board. Certainly the official presentation given in the various dioceses did not address this.

It is to be hoped that when the Pensions Board present their report to General Synod in February they will be forthcoming about the concerns we have raised, and will continue to raise.

Roger Stokes *Denominational Co-ordinator*



The Branch Executive Committee: an overview of functions

The Branch Executive carried out a review process of its roles, and since much progress has been achieved in the last 2 years, believed it was right to put an emphasis on consolidating and building the Branch membership. At the same time, it was felt that having 2 people covering most roles would provide mutual support for colleagues undertaking responsibilities on behalf of the membership.

At our AGM on 9 February, there will be an election of the new Executive. People will be elected for a two year period to each post.

If you are interested in being nominated or for finding out more information about one of the roles, then please fill out the form below, or contact Unite. Someone will then speak to you.

Maureen.German@unitetheunion.com or 0207 420 8978

Branch Chair

- This is to provide overall leadership to the Branch
- Network with external contacts in denominations, the press, BIS and political representatives
- Encourage and assist Branch activity and the Executive
- Provide vision for the Branch, take it forward and communicate with Executive
- Chair meetings effectively and co-ordinate the Executive

Secretary and Treasurer

- To act as secretary to the Branch and provide agenda, minutes and papers for Branch meetings
- To oversee the Branch accounts
- To oversee the Branch records

Membership Development Officers – 2 posts

- Co-ordinate recruitment activity
- Send out welcome letters to new members
- Follow up with members leaving the Branch
- Ensure recruitment literature and materials are relevant
- Monitor membership growth
- Identify opportunities leading to recruitment/growth, organising and membership development
- Develop the website and social networking opportunities
- Upgrade Unite membership records

Denominational Liaison Officers – 2 posts

- To ensure that teams are in place within each denomination/faith group to meet with the official bodies of each denomination
- To co-ordinate on issues impacting on members across denominational boundaries

- To ensure that the administration is in place to support this work
- Review trends in case work

Representatives and Case Management Officers – 2 posts

- To oversee the management of the Helpline
- To monitor training of representatives
- To monitor trends in case work
- To oversee case management
- To advise representatives over seeking greater support over casework
- To organise the annual conference of the Branch
- o support other conference activity

Publicity Officers – 2 posts

- To ensure that 4 newsletters are produced on time each year
- To produce an annual newsletter plan, outlining contributions required
- To propose a publicity strategy in liaison with Membership Development Officers, to continually enhance the Branch's and Unite's profile in all areas, including recruitment

Campaigns Officers – 2 posts

- To ensure we keep pressure on for the Employment Rights campaign
- To focus on co-ordinating other campaigns – in particular on health and safety
- To work with the unions campaign departments on campaigns
- To organise regional meetings for members

Branch Officer	Would like to be nominated	Would like to discuss the role with someone
Branch Chair		
Secretary and Treasurer		
Membership Development Officer		
Denominational Liaison Officer		
Representatives and Case Management Officer		
Publicity Officer		
Campaigns Officer		
Name		
E-mail		
Phone number		

Mail to: Maureen German, Unite, 35 King Street, London. WC2E 8JG or
 Maureen.German@unitetheunion.com or fax 0207 420 8999

Dates of meetings

Training for Representatives – Stage 1 11 – 13 January 2010, Esher Place, Esher, Surrey

We are really pleased to run a full Reps Stage 1 specifically for the Branch. If you have been on one of the taster days, or want to be a representative for the Branch, please contact Maureen German to reserve a space.

Branch Conference/Annual General Meeting: 9–10 February 2010, Esher Place

INSPIRING STORIES CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Faith Workers Branch Conference and AGM, 9-10 February 2010, at Esher Place, Unite’s own residential conference centre, at 30 Esher Place Avenue, Esher, Surrey, KT10 8PZ.

Following 2009’s successful two-day format, the 2010 conference aims to cover a lot of ground in not much more than 24 hours. We would want to encourage all representatives to attend, and also as many members as possible. Esher Place is a very comfortable and conducive environment for learning, sharing, and simply enjoying the company and the surroundings. It has attractive grounds and a high standard of accommodation and catering. Do come and join us for a stimulating, refreshing and heartening time.

Tuesday 9 February

- 12:00 Arrival and Lunch
- 13:00 Welcome from the Chairman
- 13:15 “Brief Encounter” exercise – enabling members to meet and exchange highlights/lowlights of their membership
- 13:45 Inspiring stories – Celebrating Success!
- 15:00 Coffee
- 15:30 Interactive role play exercise – (debrief meeting/accompanying member to meet employer – opportunity for what next questions)

Review of roles available to members in addition to reps. E.g. as contact point
- 16:45 Tea/Relaxation Break before AGM
- 17:45 AGM
- 19:00 Dinner
- 20.00 Key Note Speaker:

Roberta Rominger, General Secretary of the United Reform Church

Wednesday 10 February

- 9.00 Afterthoughts/follow up from day 1
- 9.30 Sect 23 Employment Rights
- 10.30 Coffee
- 11.00 Organisation Building - (digital blue state etc)
- 13:00 Lunch and depart

The conference is open to all members, although we do strongly encourage all representatives should attend.

To attend please fill out the registration form below

Name.....

Address.....

.....

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E-mail.....

Phone Number.....

Access Requirements.....

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Dietary Requirements.....

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Do you require travel booking?.....

.....

Please forward your registration form to: Maureen German, Unite, 35 King Street, London. WC2E 8JG
Maureen.German@unitetheunion.com or 0207 420 8978 or fax 0207 420 8999

Collating E-mails

Whilst we appreciate that not all members may be on e-mail, the vast majority of members are, and as part of improving the way that we communicate with you, we want to ensure that we have got the right e-mail for you on our membership system. This will also enable you to receive general information about the union.

Please send your name and most recent e-mail address to Maureen.German@unitetheunion.org



For more information contact Unite:
Faith Workers Helpline **0845 108 2575**
or e-mail: **faithworkers@unitetheunion.org**

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