

The Experience in Exeter: Sandra Hogan

The Twinning Partnership between Southernhay United Reformed Church, Exeter and Christuskirche, Bad Homburg

The partnership between these two churches came into being following an enquiry received by the Exeter Twinning Circle from the minister of a church in Bad Homburg. Initially, it was decided to proceed on a trial basis and each church appointed its own twinning committee. The first group visit was made to Exeter in the Autumn of 1987 and during the following five years, groups from both churches, including many young people, as well as individuals, accepted invitations to visit, mainly on a social basis. A rapport was soon established and a number of close and lasting friendships were formed.

It then became apparent that something deeper was needed for the association to prosper and grow. Discussions were held and the councils of both churches agreed to form a partnership for an initial period of five years. A document to this effect was signed by representatives of both churches in May 1992, in Exeter, in which it was agreed to explore the implications of partnership in terms of **Worship, Fellowship, Learning and Service**. There was then no hesitation in renewing this document in 1997 and beyond.

As part of the **Worship** commitment, both churches remember the other in their services by lighting candles at their monthly act of communion. In addition, members of both churches have attended two Kirchentage together. Under the heading **Learning**, there has been a study of the book of Job and a joint study of the gospel of Luke, in which individuals expressed their views on characters in this gospel. As a result a book was produced entitled, 'Changes – Faith and Experience'. Several study tours have formed and increased the aspect of **Fellowship**. The fourth aspect, **Service**, has been the provision of financial help to underprivileged parts of the world: Botswana, Armenia and currently Malawi, each on a five year basis.

Over the past twenty years many people have taken part in visits and in hosting visitors and many lasting friendships have been made. Much has also been learned about the style of worship and the way of life in the two congregations.

As time goes on, problems arise with ageing congregations, together with the cost of travel and difficulty in hosting visits. There is the lack of young people

to provide continuity of contact. There is a continued will to maintain contact by phone, email and visits, but in future this will probably have to be on a more personal level, with smaller groups or visits on an individual basis.