

## **RESPONSE FROM WYEC TO THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND DIOCESES COMMISSION**

West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council (WYEC) is one of the largest ecumenical intermediate bodies in the country. WYEC's membership includes not only the Anglican dioceses of Bradford, Ripon and Leeds, and Wakefield, but also the Catholic Diocese of Leeds, the Leeds Methodist District, the West Yorkshire Methodist District, the Yorkshire Baptist Association, the Yorkshire Synod of the United Reformed Church, the Yorkshire District of the Moravian Church, the Yorkshire Division of the Salvation Army, the Yorkshire Region of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain, the Yorkshire General Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the West Yorkshire African Caribbean Council of Churches.

Senior Church Leaders covenant together. They, and Denominational Ecumenical Officers, meet together formally in Council twice a year, as well as at other ecumenical gatherings.

We acknowledge that the proposals made by the Diocese Commission for Yorkshire have met with diverse responses across our member dioceses. Nonetheless, from an ecumenical perspective, WYEC collectively welcomes the principle that its member dioceses should come together in a single diocese, largely coinciding with the area already served by WYEC.

Such a move would not only reflect wider political and economic realities, with their associated mission potential, but would enable new ecumenical possibilities to be explored across the region.

Incongruity of denominational boundaries is one of the biggest obstacles to ecumenical progress. The proposed area bears a closer relation than at present to the Catholic Diocese of Leeds, and to two Methodist districts which are increasingly working closely together. Most other churches operate on a Yorkshire-wide basis. By removing many boundary issues, a single diocese for the WYEC area would enhance ecumenical opportunities at every level of church life.

Furthermore, the very process of bringing the dioceses together raises the possibility of establishing closer ecumenical working relations in a range of areas, especially those related to mission. Wherever sector ministers from the three dioceses discuss how the shape of future work may look in their own field of expertise, we look to those ministers to include ecumenical partners in their discussions. As new operating methods are developed, every opportunity should be taken to ensure these have an ecumenical dimension. As the existing diocesan secretariats come together into new structures, invitations should be offered to ecumenical partners to explore whether or not they would like space in the same premises, possibly opening the way to closer partnership in the future.

A merger of the dioceses, then, would reflect ecumenical realities, remove many of the obstructions caused by denominational boundaries, and offer new opportunities for cooperation between the churches. We welcome the proposal in principle.