

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and Pope Francis have been meeting in Rome. The occasion was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first official meeting of a Pope and an Archbishop since the Reformation.

Meanwhile I was co-chairing a gathering of English Roman Catholics and Anglicans who meet twice a year seeking to collaborate on a range of concerns about justice and peace, social affairs and mission.

All this is a long way from my early years in Liverpool. I still have a scar on my knee after being thrown off my bike as a youngster by a Roman Catholic lad. And I can still remember getting caught in Liverpool centre on the 12<sup>th</sup> July with a huge Orange Lodge procession.

Things improved greatly in Liverpool during the years of the partnership of bishops: Sheppard and Worlock. They were known locally as fish and chips because they were always in the newspaper!

My own journey took a new direction at university when I encountered Roman Catholic students who came in from their seminary to take various courses. These were great guys, really spiritual and full of fun.

My work as an Anglican priest took me to London where for a time I worked for the British Council of Churches. I had to attend big ecumenical conferences and at one I heard the then Catholic Archbishop Basil Hume speak.

It was a truly electric and powerful speech. I remember him urging the Roman Catholic community to co-operate more with their denominational counterparts.

I am not blind to things that divide us and authority is one of those questions. Where Catholics look to the Pope for their authority, Protestants look to the written word in the scriptures. However I still maintain that we have more that unites us than that which divides us.

We have some way to go on the road to unity.

However after five years on this gathering of Anglicans and Roman Catholics I feel we have taken steps forward together. Deep friendships and creative partnerships have been forged. We are finding ways to share the good news of the Christian faith together and how best to combat secularisation.

And there is a lot more to come about the joys and challenges for joint Anglican and Roman Catholic Schools. The church, as the rest of society, needs to learn to handle its differences peacefully and creatively.

+Geoff