

Ministers-at-Work

The Journal for Christians in
secular ministry

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To help ourselves and others to celebrate the presence of God and the holiness of life in our work, and to see and tell the Christian story there.

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Editorial

Well, you're stuck with me for a while longer! For some obscure reason several folk at the AGM thought I was "a hard act to follow." Flattery will get you (almost) anywhere. But I am in the early stages of discussion with a possible, and in my view highly capable, successor, so by next summer there may be one or more joint efforts. And no, I'm not going to say who he/she is....

So on with the show, which reminds me that a fellow guest at the Royal Foundation of St. Katherine a few weeks ago appeared dressed as Pierrot, and was off to attend a '50 years as a priest' celebration at a local church. A number of 'holy fools' were attending, so, as his name was mentioned, I looked up Roly Bain's website, which forms a cameo item later on.

I've taken the liberty of including a longish piece put together by yours truly based on one of the themes we discussed during the Conference, which harps back to the old question of 'why MSE?', this time asked by Stephen Ferns, Selection Secretary of the Church of England's Ministry Division. The whole idea of Ministry in Secular Employment can appear baffling to those with little or no experience of it, and by the time this edition goes out I will have 'done' a diocesan vocations event at which the question always comes up – several times! In a way it is frustrating to have to keep going over the same ground, but to do so is a constant reminder of first principles, and at the least it means the message is being told.

Also in this edition is a fine contribution from Dr Megan Smith, ordained this summer, and based on an essay for the East Midlands Ministerial Training Scheme. I've had a couple of other contacts from current ordinands for help with resources as they explore MSE recently, proof that MSE is alive and kicking.

Jane Fraser has contributed a perceptive review of a film shown recently on Channel 4, "Richard is my boyfriend", which addresses the sensitive area of the ability of those with learning difficulties to give consent. Jane has a particular interest and expertise in this area and I for one find her comments most helpful.

I've also adapted a short piece I did for our Parish magazine on the Fox family summer excursion to Poland. I won't mention the bit the item is about here, but I came away with a number of impressions of the country. It helped that one of my wife's brothers has worked out there for 9 years, teaching English, so we were able to get under the skin just a little. The close identity between Church and nationality was striking: to be Polish is to be Catholic. It was clear that many people call in at one of the numerous churches on their way home from work, and on Sunday mornings they were packed.

Our time in Warsaw coincided with the celebration of the 1944 Uprising, a key event in recent Polish history and identity, and one surrounded by myth in the meaning attributed to it. The event at the impressive memorial after nightfall, lit by thousands of candles was deeply memorable.

Also memorable were the granite boulders found every 50 metres or so along streets on 1950s apartment blocks. These mark the boundary of the Jewish Ghetto, 1940-43, what seems a huge area, until you remember 400,000 people were confined within it. In a city well blessed with lovely parks, one gives pride of place to the poignant memorial to the heroes of the 1943 Ghetto Uprising. Small wonder that 83% of the city was destroyed by the time it was liberated.

One amusing note. Apparently it is almost impossible to find a builder, joiner or plumber – they have “all gone to Britain”, the locals complain. So they have to make do with migrants from Belarus, and complain about them in the same way as many in the UK about Poles. Perhaps I was fortunate in growing up in Manchester; it has had a Polish community since the 1940s and several of my school-mates were Poles (and some Ukrainians and a Czech, who got out in front of the Soviet invasion of 1968). All a pleasure and enriching to know (as is Tatra beer).

I hope this edition finds you as it leaves me: entertaining, informative and looking forward to the next one! Blessings and peace.

Rob

CHRISM Conference and AGM 2007

The Conference this year re-visited the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine, Limehouse, London. It has recently undergone modernisation and is an excellent venue for meetings, Conferences, or simply to stay if you are visiting London for business or pleasure (<http://www.stkatharine.org.uk/>), a lovely oasis of calm half way between the City and Canary Wharf. It is also home to the **Michael Ranken Memorial Library**, CHRISM's library of MSE books and resources, so a reminder here that an inventory is included on our website (www.chrism.org.uk) so you can see if there is something of interest to you and arrange with the Foundation to visit. The collection is steadily growing, so if have anything you'd like to donate please do consider it, and contact the Journal Editor.

It was disappointing that friends from the USA, France or Germany didn't join us this year, but we did welcome our farthest flung attendee yet in John Smith, from Perth – Western Australia. It was a pleasure to meet John again after his trip over a couple of years ago, especially as he bought a round in "The Prospect of Whitby", London's oldest waterside pub.

The **AGM** saw the election of **Pauline Pearson** as incoming **Moderator**, *in absentia* as she had to leave just before to be back in Newcastle for the Great North Run, which was evidently a family affair:



Mike Rayner joins the Committee, with a number of the usual suspects continuing, giving a good balance of new blood and continuity. **Margaret Joachim** is **Presiding Moderator**, while **Rob Fox** was elected CHRISM representative on the Trustees of CHRISSET. CHRISSET is the Trust and Registered Charity that sits behind CHRISM and deals with its finances. It was set up after a conference at the University of Nottingham in 1982, which mapped out the way forward from MSE, and which produced a surplus of funds! One continuing issue is that CHRISSET is still without a Treasurer following the untimely death of Richard Dobell. This needs addressing rather urgently so if you are able to take on this role, even if only in the short-term, please contact Margaret. One task for the Trustees this year is to undertake a review of the structure of CHRISM / CHRISSET to ensure that if it needs to be changed it is. Finally here we expressed our thanks to **Peter King** for his steady hand as Presiding Moderator 2006-7, and to **Adrian Holdstock**, retiring Moderator, for his perceptive and challenging leadership.

The activities this year included a “rotating discussion”, with the attendees split into three groups, plus three pairs of facilitators (each pair an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ MSE, with contrasting occupations), discussing 3 questions:

- How am I Church?
- Am I Church?
- What Church am I?

We were also asked to consider the questions about MSE posed by Stephen Ferns (see article “*So ... just what IS an MSE?*”) It was notable that the shape of each discussion was different as the groups rotated, but how much in the conclusions had in common. An extra dimension was added by **David Driscoll**, Executive Officer of MILE, Mission in London’s Economy, acting as observer.

The conclusions reached, by several different routes, focussed on the Church as both gathered and dispersed; its members do not cease to be ‘Church’ when not physically in the same place, or “It is indeed right, it is our duty and our joy, *at all times and in all places*, to give you thanks and praise... .” The challenge is to be able to ‘button down’ what priesthood (of all believers as well as those ordained priest) means at a particular time and particular

place. MSEs are a visible sign of Church in places increasingly full of those un-churched, with little or no vocabulary of spirituality but seeking it. MSEs help others to articulate God, by walking alongside people, affirming the God who is with us, where we are. MSEs are itinerant Church.

This led on to the firm assertion that MSEs are Church. What sort is an open question. One point repeatedly made is that the prophet or priest is so because their ministry arises at least in part from the community (the Prophets were cited as clear examples). A priest's authority comes from both the one (or body) that sent them and the active assent of the community, be it a congregation, neighbourhood, workplace or network. In this respect the position 'parochial priest' is less priestly as they do not arise from the community but are sent to it. The Ordained Local Minister however does. Other issues flagged up were the 'hour-glass' Church – socially, educationally, economically, demographically – and whether the role of CHRISM should include supporting the establishment of a ministry training course specifically for MSE, and run more 'access events'.

David's feedback was a considerable feat as he had little time to gather his thoughts. It is a credit to his ability that they are an important outcome to the weekend. He identified two main themes in the discussions:

- How the Churches perceive you, and
- How the workplace perceives you.

For the Churches the value of MSE is that it helps them widen its horizons, to "dispel parochial ignorance about what MSEs get up to." Because of their work experience MSEs have enormous expertise, which the Churches would be stupid to neglect. By contrast local church ministers tend to have very limited experience and expertise. Workplaces tend to change continually, whereas the Churches lag behind because they are not really part of these conversations, but they need to hear them and understand some of the normal standards of the secular world, especially transparency and accountability (for example Nolan Report principles), which are gravely lacking in the institutional Churches.

In the workplace MSE exercise a ministry incarnational and, in the wide sense, sacramental, "even though you may never now when you might have been of benefit." David's comment on this was to question whether workplace chaplains are needed at all. MSEs, he observed, are more than chaplains, releasing the priesthood of all believers in the workplace, rather than inhibiting or de-skilling them, which the institutional Churches are good at. MSEs have the opportunity to be focal points in the workplace, which arises from the people we are. As to Christian activities in the workplace – don't worry if these are short-lived; the average 'life' of an activity is 7 years.

David also sees MSE as having an important role within *Fresh Expressions*, not least as "a light shining in the areas where the Churches ought to be." To be most effective *Fresh Expressions* needs to balance do-ers and be-ers, with the latter preferable. One of the main values of MSE here is to continue to look forward, and it needs to be listened to and appreciated. As numbers of paid clergy continue to fall the Churches need to plan for this and there is a role for MSEs in helping the Churches open up and become more prophetic, rather than focus on propping up the past. He called on us to remember that the Kingdom is always greater than the Church, and MSE is more Kingdom than Church.

No CHRISM Conference would be complete without the visits! This year there were three to choose from. The Jewish East End Walk is a superb tour of sites – all close to St. Katharine's – important in the history of the Jewish community in the area, smaller than it was and now joined by many more groups of more recent immigrants, each with its own colour and vibrancy. The Foundation itself stands opposite the east end of Cable Street, scene of the stands against the UK's own Fascists, Moseley's Blackshirts, in the 1930s. Another group visited Canary Wharf, a key financial hub of the world economy, yet where poverty jostles the banks, and aircraft taking off from London City Airport seem to have to fly around the offices. The third group were signed in (not quite in blood) to Custom House, next to the Tower and twixt Tower Bridge and London Bridge. A Grade 1 listed building, its magnificence is somewhat dimmed by the grimly functional furniture. A highlight was the high tide topping the

riverside footpath and flooding the car park to axle depth. Another was the walk back through Wapping, where 200-year-old warehouses have been converted into apartments, mostly for the rich (the sight of a Porsche picking its way along a cobbled road was fun).

Our final session before the concluding Communion addressed the questions:

- What did I hear?
- Whom shall I tell?

We agreed that there is priesthood, and many different ways of exercising it, both lay and ordained. There is however a division made, mostly by the Churches, between that which is financially supported by them and that which is not. The first mostly involves doing things for worshipping the believers, the second being. But both are part of the Kingdom of God. Thus different expressions of ministry, for example MSE and NSM, don't exist as 'things' in their own right, but as part of sharing in the ministry of the Kingdom of God. Our perception is that the Churches think too much in terms of their own structures as the context of ministry, and not enough of the Kingdom. This is, for example, evidenced in the way the Church of England selects and trains candidates for ordained ministry, which is built around servicing the structures.

As Jim Cummins observed, MSEs live on the edge of the institutional Churches, which are limited by the baggage of history and adherence to tradition and institution; these are the greatest enemy of truth, whereas workplace experience is very real. We noted that the Holy Spirit does not work on his own but needs to be earthed, in and through us. God needs to be brought to people's attention, so they can recognise He is already there.

We summed up thus. In the Kingdom of believers God does not distinguish between orders of ministry, lay or ordained. Within the ministry of God's Kingdom, MSEs are:

- Antennae – seeing God at work in the workplace;
- Incarnational – naming God at and in work;
- Integrational – holding up holistic and balanced life;

- Ordinary – seeing God in the everyday;
- Sharing – running to the struggle, standing up to be counted;
- Prophetic – living and proclaiming Kingdom values;
- Shrewd – a complete disinterest in getting bums on pews, but a burning desire to serve the kingdom of God.

Priesthood thus needs to be inclusive of all that it means to be a Christian.

Whom shall we tell? All who will listen.

2008 CHRISM Reflective Weekend

... is at **Hinsley Hall, Leeds**, over the weekend of **February 15 – 17**. Hinsley Hall is the Catholic Diocesan Pastoral Centre and is quite near Headingley Cricket ground (see <http://www.hinsley-hall.co.uk/>).

The theme is **Ministry beyond MSE**; full details and booking forms on the flyer with this edition.

2008 CHRISM Conference and AGM

Venue yet to be finalised, but please note the dates:
5 – 7 September.

CHRISM Membership & Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2008 have been kept at this year's rates. You can pay by check or direct debit. If you are a UK taxpayer you can also Gift Aid the subscription, so CHRISM recovers Basic Rate income tax.

If you receive a copy of the Journal and think you should be paying but aren't – please do! If you do not wish to receive the Journal please let the Editor know right away; contact details on inside front cover. Complimentary copies can also be sent out on request.

So ... just what IS an MSE?

Rob Fox

A few days before the recent CHRISM Conference Ruth Brothwell, a member of the CHRISM Committee, met **Revd Stephen Ferns**, Senior Selection Secretary in the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, a post he's held since last year. Stephen was previously a Selection Secretary and the Vocations Officer within the Division and now runs the Ministry Division unit responsible for the process of selecting candidates for ordained and accredited lay ministry.

Stephen raised four questions about MSE, in part to aid his own understanding of just what it is. When I come to them below, they will no doubt be familiar! He wondered whether MSE as a concept is "tired" and still relevant to the Churches' work. As part of the Conference, discussion groups were asked to come up with elements of a reply and what follows is based on the thoughts that emerged. There is also a strong personal angle and I stress that what is written here is not the final reply or definitive view of CHRISM! I do hope though to open up the questions to a wider audience, not least as they take us back to first principles, which is always a good thing.

First some **introductory comments**. There is nothing inherently ordained or clerical about Ministry in Secular Employment. To quote from the home page of our website: "CHRISM is an association for *all Christians* (my emphasis) who see their secular employment as a primary field of Christian ministry and for those who would support and encourage that vision." In large part for historical reasons the membership of CHRISM is predominantly ordained and Anglican. The Nottingham Conference 25 years ago that gave raise to the network that begat CHRISM comprised largely Anglicans who were looking at how the fresh expression that was / is Non-Stipendiary Ministry relates to MSE. However what is now CHRISM has always valued and been enriched by the contributions of both lay and ordained, by the other Church traditions that have contributed to the development of MSE within the UK, and the in-

ternational links that have been fostered in Europe, North America and Australasia.

It is also the case that Ministry in Secular Employment is contextual; the language and mode of expression we may use will vary according to the context we are working in. Here the context of the questions is of a senior officer of the Church of England with a brief for authorised ministry within that Church. The form of the proposed replies therefore both reflects the context and the way in which the questions are posed. This begs the question of whether the questions would get a different answer if asked in another context. I think the answers would be the same. The language might differ, and the starting point, but not the conclusions. I also suggest that the methodology used here is valid for use in any other context, Church or secular. So, on with the questions.

What is the difference between an MSE and a theologically articulate baptised Christian? (i.e. lay vs. ordained MSE)

I've already noted that MSE does not automatically mean ordained, but as the question is here raised in the context of authorised ministry then the answer too should be in that context. As far as I am aware, the Church of England does not currently authorise laypersons to ministry that may include their workplace other than in the context of Reader ministry, and for a small minority of Readers at that. That there are Reader MSEs is a fact, albeit not widely known other than in the few Dioceses that support Reader MSE. Within the Church of England therefore the majority of MSEs in authorised ministry are ordained.

Now I have to confess here to somewhat imposing a direction of enquiry on the discussion group I was in at the Conference; there is a time to be decisive and I'm convinced this was one of them. The Ordinal sets out the characteristics and work of the priesthood in the Church of England, and it is against these that the place and value of ordained MSE in it must be assessed. The methodology works in any other church context too: Deacons, Readers, Ministers in any denomination, Lay preachers, Elders. And as the question implies "why ordained?" this is the correct place to start. What follows is

not an exhaustive commentary, more a first step, but it does show how MSE measures up.

From "The Ordination of Priests", Common Worship.

"Priests are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent."

Priests are sent to those people amongst whom they will be. In the context of the Church this will normally be a congregation (or two ...). In the context of community it will be the area in which they live, the activities in which they share and those among whom they work. For an MSE this therefore includes colleagues in their secular work context.

"With their Bishop and fellow ministers, they are to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God's new creation."

The MSE does this, including in the work context. As Michael Ranken put it, and as has become the motto found on the front cover of "Ministers-at-Work": our task as MSEs is *"To help ourselves and others to celebrate the presence of God and the holiness of life in our work, and to see and tell the Christian story there."*

This is exactly in tune with the Ordinal.

"They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord; they are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for his family, to search for his children in the wilderness of this world's temptations, and to guide them through its confusions, that they may be saved through Christ for ever."

This again is exactly what MSEs are and do, in the context of their secular work as much as the Church context they find themselves in. Messengers to the workplace, watchmen (and women!) for and stewards of Kingdom values, admonishing where it is needed, feeding the people of God where they are. Indeed it is the MSEs who are out there in "the wilderness", grappling with the world's "confusions" in the midst of them, able to guide "his children" all the better for sharing their day to day experiences of the workplace.

“Formed by the word, they are to call their hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ’s name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins.”

MSEs are indeed formed by the Word – the same Word as any priest, and call hearers to repentance in contexts that few parochial priests have access to. As ‘one of us’ they hear and speak to the work context in way that a Chaplain cannot. And as I wrote in the CHRISM paper of MSE Parables, my own work role includes revealing that which is sin, calling for repentance and declare absolution and forgiveness. That I can do this as both priest and worker adds value to both.

“With all God’s people, they are to tell the story of God’s love.”

The question above rather begs here another: what is the difference between a priest and a theologically articulate Christian? Or indeed any baptised Christian. At this point there isn’t one, for in this respect all God’s people share priestly ministry. Which reminds us that ultimately priestly ministry belongs to the whole people of God, not a chosen few.

“They are to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith.”

Along with all those licensed to do so, ordained MSEs baptise new disciples, welcoming them into God’s family. As an MSE I also have the privilege of walking with them in the way of Christ *where they walk*, and nurture them in the faith as one who shares their daily experiences.

“They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God.”

It is an unbounded joy as an MSE to be able to do this in so many different ways and among so many disparate people, most of whom have no regular contact with an organised Church. Priestly ministry should know no bounds.

“They are to preside at the Lord’s table and lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”

In common with the great majority of ordained MSEs, I am licensed to a local church, in my case a team of four (soon to be five) varied congregations. I share in presiding at the Lord's table, leading worship, and offering with God's people *"a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving."* The advantage I have as an MSE is to be able to bring in a daily experience that is not shared by my stipendiary colleagues (whom I love dearly), but is shared by many among whom I minister on a Sunday. There are of course other ordained ministers who are able to bring different dimensions, drawn from their daily experience of life, for example in their local community.

"They are to bless the people in God's name."

Note: bless the people, not just God's people. We fervently pray in our services for various aspects of the life of the world, often from the perspective of what we have read and what holds our imagination at that time, and often using a liturgy in which the world of work does not loom very large! I can bring in what I know of as part of my daily experience, and hear the work experiences in a language we share, but which may be obscure to a 'full time' priest.

"They are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, and intercede for all in need."

There is evil in aspects of the world of work. To be resisted it needs to be understood and those who resist need to be informed about just what the evil is. Not easy from the outside. And in the workplace there are the weak and the poor: best supported and defended from close to, not far away.

"They are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death."

It was a particular joy to hear from a colleague just before the Conference who had been off work for three months with stress. He is not a Church-goer, but loved none the less by our Heavenly Father. He is regularly in my prayers, and needs my support as he returns to work. If I were not praying for him, he would be 'off the radar.' Again, last year one of our trainer team was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He insisted on working as long as he could stand, and even then asked if there was development work he could do at home. As so often, he did more to prepare those of us responsible

for him for his death than we for him. His wife and children though were grateful for what we did for them in those last few weeks. Note the 'we'; as part of a team at work we share each other's burdens. I have heard so many similar tales from MSEs; this is priesthood in action.

"Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith."

Please excuse my using a soapbox for a moment. The Church as organisation is, in my experience, poor at recognising and using the gifts of God's people, particularly those fostered in their secular work. And I am more than ready to deluge anyone who wants me to elaborate with examples! MSEs do have the advantage that they tend to be much more in tune with gifts manifest in a secular environment that tend to go unrecognised in Church context. This is not to imply that parish priests are not doing this part of the priestly calling, simply that many don't have the equipment to do it comprehensively.

Two points to emphasise here. The Ordinal's description of the characteristics of priesthood is not exclusive to those ordained priest. Indeed apart from presiding at the Lord's table each mark of priesthood is equally a mark of a baptised Christian who takes up the challenge of their baptism. Then note that the characteristics can be divided into two heads: being and doing. The first and third sentences are concerned with being: servants, shepherds, messengers, watchmen and stewards. All the other sentences describe the 'doing' that this 'being' should lead to. It has long been commonplace among MSEs to recognise that the core of Ministry in Secular Employment is being, and the terms used in the Ordinal sum up very well what the MSE is. As noted the ordained MSE then *does* all those things that are characteristic of priesthood. The context in which they do them may often be different from the 'normal' context, but step outside the box for a moment and you will see that it is indeed the same doing, just outside the box!

What is the difference between an MSE and an NSM?

I'm mischievously inclined to answer:

"I don't know. What is the difference between an MSE and an NSM?"

"One is a Minister in Secular Employment while the other has No Specific Ministry..."

This does of course dig up the hoary chestnut of the inadequacy of the term NSM. Is it proper to define something by what it is not? But this is not the place to go into that one.

I think CHRISM has sometimes been over-zealous in emphasising the distinctiveness of MSE. The truth of the matter is that, at least in terms of authorised ministry that is not remunerated by the Church, there is a spectrum rather than neat little boxes into which folk can be placed. Points along the spectrum may be identifiable, but there are no clear distinctions between them. For example we might pick out:

- a minister in full-time paid employment with a secular employer (which includes the Church in some cases) who has a very real ministry in their workplace,
- a minister in full-time paid employment with a secular employer who is unable to exercise a ministry in the workplace but who financially supports themselves in giving 15 hours a week to the parish,
- someone in part-time employment who puts themselves at the disposal of the Church (which may or may not be paid for) in some of their non-employed time,
- the retired MSE who agrees to work unpaid for the Church, perhaps on a 'house for duty' basis,
- an early retired person whom the Church employs on a part-time basis as and when needed,
- the house wife or husband who is financially supported by their spouse and who finds they can work for the Church unpaid for so many hours a week,
- a job seeker who uses the quota of weekly hours of voluntary work they are allowed before losing benefit to work in a parish or chaplaincy.

But many MSEs / NSMs don't fit neatly into any of the above, but borrow elements of several.

Where does NSM end and MSE begin? I can't give a definitive answer. Perhaps we don't need one, particularly as just where any individual is on the spectrum will change over time. One day I too hope to exchange Employment for Ease. (Who said 'fat chance'?)

One final matter here: should the spectrum include those stipended by the Church(es)? I suggest it should.

What is distinctive about the priestly ministry of the MSE? (i.e. what kind of priesthood is being exercised – perhaps prophetic / apostolic?)

I recall it was said of the early Blair / Brown years that when asked about the most important plank of their political platform the reply was, "It's the economy, stupid!"

It should be pretty clear from the response to the first question that this is the answer here too. The context, working and being in the economy, is the difference. Nothing more, and nothing less. Those who identify themselves as MSE on the spectrum see the place and context in which they work, as part of the economy, as a key arena of ministry. It is apostolic in that they are sent, representatives and messengers of the Kingdom of God, and prophetic in that they call into question what is around them and they are part of against Kingdom standards. The being and the doing is no different from any other priest. It is the context that is distinct.

Would an MSE approach a line manager and ask for some kind of recognition of their priestly ministry within the workplace?

- **Would there be an agreement on the role to be performed?**
- **What from would it take?**

We were unanimous on this one: it depends! And no, that is not a fudge. One of our number is, for example, Chaplain to a large city council, as well as running its Legal Department. The latter does of course come first. In most case however there is not and ought not

to be a formal agreement. To do so raises all sorts of issues for the employer: should all faiths represented in the organisation be afforded an equal opportunity for such recognition? How do you appraise it? Is there a time or resource cost? Who within the organisation could or should make the decision? Therefore where the employer requests formal recognition and an agreement, so be it. But in the majority of cases, where this is not the case, there is no reason to seek it.

Interestingly, the outside observer invited to comment on our discussions has just been appointed as Chaplain to the Treasury and HMRC staff (my lot) working at 100 Parliament Street, London. His authorised contribution to them, coming from outside, will be valuable, but the greater value will come from within – not blessed with a formal agreement, but valued by the organisation because of the support it gives to staff. And I don't recall Paul asking permission from the City Council of Ephesus – or anywhere else for that matter – before exercising his apostolic ministry. Perhaps in these days of frontier ministry we should remember that there are already large numbers of ministers who are out there in the wilderness, working diligently for the Kingdom.

So what is an MSE? Nothing more and nothing less than any other Christian minister. If baptised, called to exercise the ministry of all baptised Christians. If ordained the MSE takes a full part in the work of the ordained ministry. The context in which they exercise this ministry, the Church's ministry, may be different to those who minister within a church building, congregation or parish, but it is no less a response to the call to be and to do.

An evening prayer

The day is slowly fading into the evening shadows.

Glory to God's grace

To keep us safe in our place of rest.

The night, being a friend of sleep,

Has risen up to take lights place.

Film Review

Jane Fraser

Richard is my boyfriend. Shown on Channel 4 TV on 7.8.2007 at 11.05 p.m. Written by Zinnie Harris. Produced & directed by Ian Duncan and Oliver Morse.

This is a film about two young lovers, Anna and her boyfriend Richard, and their developing sexual relationship. The fact that they are not yet married is not seen as an issue. The key theme, however, is Anna's capacity to give informed consent to sexual intercourse. Although Anna is 24, she is deemed to have a mental age of five. Richard also has a learning disability but is more able than Anna and helps in a local tea shop.

The story line is one that is familiar to those of us who, like me, have worked with and for young people with disabilities in a professional capacity with the aim of enabling them to develop relationships that bring them acceptance, love and pleasure (1). Anna and Richard are clearly in love and take every opportunity to sneak off together for time alone with a kiss and a cuddle. Richard comes round to Anna's house one evening when, just for once, Anna's mother, Michelle, has left the sleeping Anna alone in bed so she can share a birthday drink with her friends. Anna wakes up and lets Richard in – not just to the house, but also to her bed, with the result that, some weeks later, it becomes evident that she is pregnant. In her desperation to avoid the possibility of becoming responsible for Anna's baby as well as for Anna, Michelle obtains an abortion inducing pill via the web and persuades Anna to take it to 'make her stomach upset better'. She also tricks her ex-husband, Steve, into paying for this via his credit card. Needless to say, when the statement comes through and he realises what he has unwittingly purchased, his views on the abortion and Anna's relationship with Richard, are totally at variance with Michelle's.

From this point onwards, various professionals become involved in deciding Anna's fate. Either she is to be sterilized so she can continue her relationship with Richard without fear of a further, un-

planned and unwanted pregnancy, or she has to be kept at home and supervised at all times in order to prevent her meeting Richard again.

Although this film that was made for TV has no reference to religious belief, the ethical dilemmas acted out within the story-line are, none the less, ones that continue to tax the major faiths and, in particular, the Christian denominations. Free will and self-determination are examined within the context of a young woman with a learning disability's capacity to give informed consent. The use and abuse of power is seen within the context of decisions made for Anna by her parents and the various professionals who make decisions that have a profound effect on the quality of her life and relationships. The issue of respect for the value we place on every life (or lack of it) is also seen throughout the film and even in the timing of its transmission (when most good folks have gone to bed).

I was also reminded of the importance of accurate, experience-based information in making decisions and how the use of distorted or incorrect information has such potential for harm in our lives and the lives of those to whom we relate. The reason Anna became pregnant despite their use of a condom was because Richard had been given insufficient information about how to use it. His teacher had demonstrated how to use a condom by rolling it onto a banana and failed to see that Richard did not have the capacity to transfer information from one context to another. The gynaecologist gave insufficient information on alternative methods of administering hormonal contraception other than the oral contraceptive, a method which would have required Michelle's agreement and cooperation which was not forthcoming. The official solicitor, appointed to assess Anna's ability to form a consenting relationship with Richard, failed to get any verbal response from Anna about her feelings whilst her mother was present. She also failed to see Anna with Richard, unlike the psychiatrist who observed Anna relating joyfully to Richard in a way that enhanced the capacity for friendship and mutuality in both, and demonstrated their love for each other in a way that words could not.

Increasingly, professionals are coming to an understanding of consent as a concept that is not simply conveyed intellectually and verbally but also (and sometimes alternatively) demonstrated through our actions and body language. When someone's language and intellectual skills are limited, we have to place greater emphasis on observation of the emotional and physical responses to a situation or relationship in order to assess their consent. It is, in my opinion, a mark of lack of respect for someone with a disability, when we fail to take this into consideration. One of the most profoundly disturbing images in this film was the extreme distress and overall deterioration in Anna at the end of the film when she was permanently deprived of her relationship with Richard.

If we believe that all of us are equal in the eyes of God and that we are made to relate to him in love, as he relates to us in love, then this film should be deeply challenging to us. Jesus placed a child before his disciples (2) and told them that 'unless you ... become like one of these, you will not enter into the kingdom of Heaven' (3). He took the least powerful person in society – one with no social, economic, political or intellectual standing and confirmed their priority in the eyes of God over those who use and even abuse their social, economic, political or intellectual standing. As for those who abuse their vulnerability, some of his most outspoken warnings are directed towards them (4).

The Revd. Canon Jane Fraser

(Jane is a Minister in Secular Employment working as a trainer and consultant on sexuality issues. She is also Chair of CSCS – Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality)

Notes:

- (1) See Bodysense website at www.bodysense.org.uk
- (2) Matthew 18:2
- (3) Matthew 18:3
- (4) Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2

Discipleship and ministry in the workplace

Megan Smith

Over the past year I have been trying to understand something of the difference both Christian discipleship, but more specifically, ordained ministry, make to a Christian in the secular workplace. This article represents a summary of my reflections through personal Bible study (mainly the Gospel of John) and reading on the core principles underlying that discipleship and ministry that I believe make workplace ministry distinctive. After a brief introduction to the history of ministry in secular employment, and the specific context of my work (which naturally highly influenced the direction of the reflections), the reflections are divided into 3 key areas: trust, motivation, and foundation for actions. A conclusion is then offered.

Introduction

Discussions of ordained ministers continuing to undertake secular work inevitably, usually quickly, lead to the precedent and teaching of St Paul. Paul frequently emphasizes the manual work that he and his companions continue to undertake, despite their clear role as itinerant apostles (e.g. 1 Cor 4:11; 1 Thess 2:9; 1 Cor 9:6). He also recommends this as the course of action for others in the young churches he has established (1 Thess 4:11). The principle reasons for this seem to be a lack of monetary dependence on others (therefore for him and his companions also conferring freedom of action and speech, as they are not beholden to any man) as well as affirming that honest, diligent, hard work is a part of the order of life created by God.

Although not explicitly stated in the New Testament, it has been purported that Paul also used his tent-making/leather-working workshop as a setting for missionary preaching (1). Paul's choice to work as a craftsman (reviled by the aristocratic classes) has also been credited with transforming the attitude of the church to work (2). The context of ministry in secular employment (MSE) today, although consistent with these principles, encompasses wider is-

sues of ministry and the nature of church. As the early church became richer (with its adoption by the Roman Empire) the trend became for clergy to leave their secular trades. It was not until the 1930s that the issue of ministry in the workplace returned to the agenda of the church (in the UK) with Barry writing that:

“the secular tasks of the world are integral elements in the life of the Church.....else holiness is a word with no meaning. The family, the professions and council changers, the technical skill on which modern life depends, are not merely fields for experiment in which to test our loyalty to the Church. They are themselves the material of Churchmanship. That is to say, it is not merely a question of carrying out into life amid the temptations of the world. It is a question of doing the world’s work and responding to its opportunities with insight cleansed and motive directed by the grace of God through Jesus Christ” (3).

This final sentence is prophetic of what MSE has become for most who engage in it. It took however another 25 years for the concept of self-supporting ministry to be developed in practice, and initially that was purely in support of the parochial system (4). Individual clergy who have found themselves in this position seem to have responded to their understanding of their call and developed workplace ministry without any strategic direction from the wider church. Some attempts have been made to describe the role of the MSE, such as that by General Synod in 1985:

“listening to colleagues with troubles and offering comfort and counsel, but also in terms of exploring for themselves and discussing with others, for example, how sin and salvation are experienced and talked about in terms of daily work and leisure. Such people are missionaries on the frontiers of the Church. They deserve support and encouragement, not merely with fine words but also by action and administration.” (5).

But as each workplace situation is unique, so it is more likely that unifying principles on which MSE are based might be found, rather than a unifying description of a role.

The specific workplace context behind this reflection is the National Health Service, where most staff are highly motivated to offer good

quality care and support to their patients, regardless of their spiritual motivation. It is therefore a good context to look more critically at the principles that might make MSE distinctive. Writing as a consultant physician, the context is one of management (both people and systems) rather than just the delivery of care. Most employees work long hours with the associated physical tiredness with the stress of a pressurized and uncertain management situation (changing almost daily).

In this context of both MSE and my specific background the reflections which follow naturally grouped into the 3 main focuses of trust and security, motivation and foundations for actions. The Bible reading has mainly focused on John's gospel with occasional excursions into the minor prophets, particularly Habakkuk and Malachi.

Reflections

Trust

The workplace minister will be subject to the same stressors as other fellow workers and a fundamental necessity is therefore to find, and offer to others, a basis for maintaining equilibrium within that environment not significantly disrupted by the stressors.

The OED defines trust as “firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something” (noun) and also to “commit (someone or something) to the safekeeping of” (verb) (7). A firm faith and trust in God, which is not shaken by difficult circumstances, is the fundamental foundation for workplace ministry. Henri Nouwen speaks of the invitation to a life of prayer which is the invitation to live in the midst of the world without being caught up in the net of wounds and needs (8). This is similar in some ways to the prayer of Jesus in John 17:13-18 that we might be in the world but not affected by the pressures of the world around. Another picture, inspired by John 7:32-36 is that of living in the centre of a whirlwind where there is perfect stillness despite the devastation which is going on around. Any movement away from the eye of the whirlwind immediately leads to one being buffeted by the storm. Being a minister at work is about interpreting the

storm through the eyes of God, rather than interpreting God through the storm.

If one is in the workplace as a response to the call of God then he groundedness and security needed should lead to intercession and waiting before God in prayer for answers if they are not apparent at the time as with Habakkuk. He held the complaints of the world before God when he could not answer them himself "I shall stand on the ramparts and look to see what answer is given" (Hab 2:1)

It is folly for the workplace minister to feel that they be able to offer a solution to the stresses of those around them, rather they must point people in the direction where they can find their own groundedness and serve as a living example themselves. There is also the responsibility to hold these people before God in prayer. It may be tempting to think that the attendant stresses of the modern world are new and unique to it. Although the exact circumstances are different as society changes and as technological development increases pace, the stress of the job of ministering the word of God in difficult situations where people do not even acknowledge Him is not new and is in fact very similar to that of the Old Testament prophets as well as Jesus himself.

If this grounding in God can truly be achieved then the whole perspective of the minister's worldview will change, as God becomes the source of all life, inspiration and security both personally and professionally. In the story of the feeding of the 5000 (John 6:7-9) Philip saw the problem as having 5000 people to feed. Andrew however saw the resources that were available of two fishes and five loaves and gave them to Jesus. This difference in perspective is key to a sustainable trust in God. A virtuous circle of trust and belief can then be allowed to develop as experience of answered prayer feeds further faith.

The gospel goes on to record that Jesus later promised that anything that was asked in his name would be done (John 14:13). It is interesting that although resources are available, they have to be requested rather than simply automatically being provided. This supports the principle that a fundamental component of MSE is interces-

sory prayer, both for individuals, but also for organizations and the work of the minister him/herself. This cycle of trust and belief seems to be something that Jesus particularly tried to engender in his disciples. He did not reveal his plans all at once to his disciples (John 16:17-18). Although it might appear that revelation of plans and the future might lie got might alleviate some stress it would not necessarily lead to the deeper grounding that is required for long-term sustainability of ministry.

Motivation

As with all ministry the motivation to minister in the workplace must come as a response to the call of God to that ministry. I would define the difference between a Christian living out their faith as a disciple of Christ in the workplace and someone who is developing a work-based ministry to be that the minister has a calling to focus specifically on the development of a ministry, whereas the disciple is to live for Christ in the workplace and to take ministry opportunities as they arise without necessarily being focused on the development of ministry. This is in keeping with the more traditional parochial-based view of specific ministry in the parish, where all have a calling to minister, but the ordained minister has a particular role in developing ministry.

One of the key themes of the prophet Malachi is the expectation of God that we will give him the best of all that we can offer. That therefore has to include the best of our work time and resources. This sacrificial view of motivation answers concern that developing workplace ministry is in any way related to status in comparison with others in the workplace. It is in fact the following after the incarnation of Jesus, dwelling on earth and sharing the vulnerability and difficulties of all people. The basis of Jesus' incarnational ministry was that of an unceasing love the world. John 15:35 telling of love involving laying down life for friends, is eclipsed by John 3:16's statement of God loving the world to the extent that he sent his only son to die for it. The challenge of the workplace minister is to have that non-variable love for those within the workplace in the entirety of their being even though some will be very difficult to get on with. The drive of that motivation of love allows for the con-

tinuation of ministry even though the world may be in opposition to it (John 15:18).

The ongoing unceasing love of the world led to some of the conflict with Jesus in his ministry. However Hosea 6:6 suggests that ongoing steady loyalty is better than dramatic bouts of commitment. Workplace ministry therefore must by definition be a long-term undertaking rather than being about grand projects with obvious immediate results.

Jesus was very focused in his ministry stating that his role was to do the will of his father who had sent him (John 4:36-38). Obedience to that call and performing that work was then life sustaining rather than life draining. Jesus seems at times to work without a break and states that his role was simply to see what God is doing and to do the same (John 5:17). The workplace Minister in a sense therefore has to function without agenda, but rather pray for open eyes to see the work of God and fit in with it. Working on the basis of this motivation a potential conflict for the workplace minister, indeed any Christian disciple in the workplace, is the need to do what is right, not what pleases everyone (John 19:12). This may well therefore leave the minister not being the most popular person with either the employer or their colleagues. To compromise would however be to compromise the essence of the ministry. This is a particular reason why the recommendation of the Anglican Church that a minister in secular employment should have that role formally recognized by the employer (9) is potentially undermining of the basis of ministry itself.

Foundation for actions

There seem to be three strands that should underlie all the actions of the workplace minister: firstly prayer, secondly thankfulness, and thirdly recognition of God in the middle of situations. Henri Nouwen suggests that the busier we are in this world the more essential is the life of contemplative prayer (10). In some ways this relates to the concept of living in the eye of the storm discussed earlier but also much more clearly focuses on the necessity of prayer. Habakkuk used this as a deliberate strategy without which he was not able to perform his prophetic ministry. When that prayer does lead to

someone speaking and acting as the messenger of the Lord of hosts, people will hang on to those words (Malachi 2:7).

The life of prayer engenders the mindset that the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). There is no place for valuing human reputation (John 12:43) as following the ministry of Christ may well lead one into conflict with the desire for human approval. John 13:12 –17 provides a reminder that we are primarily there to serve. This again suggests there is no place for official recognition of ministry by the employer. Official approval of the role of minister may lead to conflict when there is need to speak out prophetically against some aspect of the organization/employer. Even with no written directives against this, there would probably be a tacit expectation for the minister to ultimately support the employer.

Jesus was not at all defensive in the face of authorities, which profoundly disagreed with him (John 18:19-24), as his sole concern was doing the work of his father, and his complete authority came from that relationship. This does not however mean that controversy has to be courted. There were times when Jesus avoided conflict (John 7:1&2). Although human approval is not a good foundation or motivation for ministry, St Paul suggests that the reputation of the gospel is powerfully communicated when we have a reputation for good conduct (Philippians 1:27). The fundamental question to the workplace minister and particularly workplace priest is "is God glorified" (John 13:31). Priestly vocation is to glorify God in all we do (John 7:18). The role of the minister therefore in prayer is simply to continually ask God to intervene in the world and carry out his purposes. This allows God to look after his own reputation. Denying this is colluding with the fallacy that man is self-made and self-sufficient. It will also aid us as we are called to dwell in Christ (John 15:7). There is particular example in John 17 that we should pray directly and unashamedly what is on our hearts. That must apply also to be difficulties and pressures of workplace ministry.

Another key theme of St Paul is thankfulness to God regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. He was particularly

qualified to speak on this due to his own frequent mistreatment and imprisonment. He gives particular instruction in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 of instruction to thankfulness in all circumstances and also again in Philippians 4:4 with the injunction to rejoice in the Lord always. The consequence of both these deliberate actions is that it enables one to stay focused on the power and authority of God in the world rather than to focus on the difficulties and stresses of the world. Remembrance of who God is and also what God has done in previous experience increases faith and stamina but also again powerfully communicates a source of hope to those to whom one is ministering.

The final of the three components of the foundation for actions is that of seeing God in the middle of situations. This is a natural consequence of building trust and security in God alongside the discussion that has already been put forward about motivation and doing the will of the Father. Pausing and asking for God to reveal himself in the middle of difficult situations is a natural result of contemplative prayer. It removes any concern about the outcome of the situation if it is believed that God is working in all situations but the issue for the minister is to discern where this is and then to join in that work. It also forms the basis on which the practicalities of the specific role for the workplace minister, which will vary according to setting and time. It suggests a fluid and responsive ministry, with less emphasis on strategy and vision that might be the case in other areas of ministry.

Conclusion

My conclusion from a year of reflecting and reading is simply that ministry in the secular workplace is a focused outworking of discipleship in that context. The principles underlying workplace ministry and discipleship are no different from those underpinning any other context, but they have a very focused application. The personal stressors that I face at work are the same as those faced by colleagues. Workplace ministry therefore involves a responsibility to find security in the God of peace in the middle of the situation and then drawing others towards that anchor. A secure and sustained relationship with God is necessary for all Christian ministry, but these

reflections would suggest that that is even more applicable to MSE. A task orientated "job description" would be difficult to draw for such a role, which may be one of the reasons why it is the church administration seems to struggle at times with it. It also means that asking a secular employer to provide official backing is likely to be bizarre to them, as well as the points discussed earlier of the potential detrimental effect on ministry of such sanction.

This "being" model of ministry is much more in keeping with a more catholic view of priesthood than one I would subscribe to, but does seem to fit the calling of a minister in secular employment. It mirrors the incarnational ministry of Christ. The concept of incarnational ministry has begun to be widely accepted in the context of poverty and deprivation (both with urban ministry in the western world, but also the base communities of liberation theology in a wider setting). My understanding is that MSE is in principle very similar, just in a very different context. The minister is to offer a living example of hope in the midst of difficulties and to represent God in the middle of an organisation which has no focus on God, holding people and institutions before the throne of grace.

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A summer holiday – with a twist

Rob Fox

Harvest was already well under way early in August as our coach wound its way through the rolling hills of southern Poland, past sleepy villages, neat cottages and fruit trees that groaned under the weight of apples, pears or sugar plums. We were heading for the little town of Oswiecim, in the mining area of Upper Silesia, known to the rest of the world by its German name: Auschwitz.

Nothing – neither books nor TV documentaries – really prepares one for this place. There are really three camps. Auschwitz I & II were 'merely' concentration camps, providing slave labour for the nearby chemical factories, moved to be out of range of Allied bombers. Life expectancy averaged three months, before starvation, disease or sheer exhaustion overcame most. Auschwitz I, up to 1939 a red-brick a Polish army barracks, houses the main museum - with piles of suitcases, spectacles, shoes, toothbrushes, and human hair – sorted to be sent off to Germany for re-use. There too is the one intact gas chamber and crematorium, grimly functional, and just a stone's throw from where the Kommandant and his family lived.

The death camp is Birkenau, a half mile away. Two large fenced compounds with a rail siding in the middle. Trains arrived and disgorged their unsuspecting human cargoes; many dressed in their Sabbath best, as if on a trip to the country. Most children and the elderly were herded 2,000 at a time into the underground 'shower rooms', from which the only exit was to the crematoria next door. Those who could work were crowded by the hundred into the compound huts, until they could labour no more and it became their turn for extermination. The fleeing SS guards tried to cover up the horrors, burning down the wooden huts (those of brick remain), blowing up the gas chambers and crematoria – now just as they were found in January 1945 - and destroying most of the records. From what remains it is estimated that at least 1.5 million people died here, the great majority Jews, but also tens of thousands of others. A memo-

rial has been erected in black stone close to the crematoria, with inscriptions in each of the languages spoken by the victims, at least the ones we know about.

The most striking thing is just how well suited Birkenau is to its purpose: a factory to kill people and dispose of the bodies on an industrial scale. Despite the heat of the day, a chill hung over the place. It reminds us that a place of work can be a well-oiled machine yet still have a sinister purpose; efficiency is neutral. (You can see for yourself at <http://www.auschwitz.org.pl/html/eng/start/index.php>).

Yet there were signs of hope. The story of the Polish priest who asked to go to the 'starvation cell' in place of a man who had a family. The man lived to tell the tale. Then the few hundred children who survived, kept alive because they could work, or were experimented on by the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele ('Dr. Death'). When the Red Army liberated the camps they were at first afraid, but when they realised that these strangers meant them no harm, signs of life appear in the faces that stare at the camera. Orphaned, but alive.

What happened here stands as a witness against hatred of 'the other', and I left with deep respect for our guide, Anna, 11 years in the role and with no trace of bitterness.

Resources

Activate runs a website well worth a visit, at <http://www.activatecv.org.uk/about.html>. As I can't improve on the introduction on the site:

"Activate exists to encourage, resource and inspire Christian woman to reach their friends, neighbours, work colleagues and relatives with God's love. It enables women to be secure in their identity, living life as Jesus intended it in all its fullness and at the heart of their community, creating innovative and natural opportunities, openings and friendships. Our aim is to be creative, forward thinking and always stretching the boundaries of how Christian women can be salt and light in a fluid society."

Activate runs two main events a year, with the next being 9-11 November at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry, titled "All decked out". It also publishes a magazine, runs presentation and training days, and has recently published a book, 'Unlocking the Door – Evangelism in the Real World', Authentic Media, priced at £5.99, and available through the Activate office or ask at your local Christian Bookshop. (ISBN 1-85078-645-3).

The Bible on your mobile!

Ecumen is a new service run by Teimlo Ltd., of South Wales, providing a daily prayer and reading direct to your 'phone – for a subscription. You can download ringtones using your favourite riff from a Christian artist (*Delirious* appear twice), or, this being Wales, *Bread of Heaven*. For £6 you can even download the Bible, in a choice of 3 versions. More at <http://www.ecumen.com/web/home>

The Money Revolution "helps you apply Christian principles to handling your money", offering "a distinctively Christian slant on issues such as: Ethical spending, Credit and Debt, Savings, Generosity and Insurance." The website, <http://www.themoneyrevolution.net/>, includes free downloads and links to a wide range of useful resources, including spreadsheets to help you review your own finances.

The venture has the enthusiastic endorsement of the Church of England and recently launched a booklet titled "The Money Revolution", by John Preston, "a leading Church of England specialist on personal finance and giving." It retails at £3 (less in bulk), is published by Authentic Media and can be bought from its website, to which there is a link.

Faith at Work (New Zealand) runs an interesting website, at <http://www.faithatwork.org.nz/index.htm>, which flags up three books:

Where's God on Monday?, by Alistair Mackenzie and Wayne Kirkland – a car dealer and a pastor - 108pp. NZ\$19.95 + p&p, NavPress NZ Ltd., Email: navpressnz@maxnet.co.nz

Soul purpose, by Alistair Mackenzie, Wayne Kirkland and Annette Dunham; NZ\$29.95 + p&p, also NavPress.

Faith at WORK, edited by Don Mathieson QC, and including contributions from a range of authors, including the above. Available from Castle Publishing, (198pp. NZ\$24.95 + P&P); Email castle@challengeinternet.com

Two more recent books of interest are:

Catholic Social Teaching and the Market Economy, edited by Philip Booth, Institute of Economic Affairs, 2007; 276pp; £15.00; ISBN 978-0-255-36581-9.

The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work, Darrell Cosden, Paternoster, 2006; 148pp; £8.99; ISBN 978-1842-227-2626.

If any reader would like to submit a review this is most welcome.

Greg Pierce, former President of the **National Center for the Laity**, the widely respected US promoter of ministry in and through work, is shortly publishing a new book, ***The Mass is never ended***, which will be available through the NCL website, www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm. Greg also currently runs a cyberspace 'Dialogue on the Spirituality of Work', which you can join in by sending your email address to his secure site: gpierce@actapublications.com.

News

The re-structuring of Ministry Training Courses by the Church of England has, amongst other new entities, seen the appearance of a real mouthful: the **Southern North West Training Partnership**. Based in Chester, and with outstations in Manchester and Liverpool, SNWTP will replace the Northern Ordination Course in these areas. The Director is Anne Dawtry, who formally headed the Manchester Diocesan Ordained Local Ministry course. More at: <http://www.snwtp.org/index.html>

First bid for a handy abbreviation of the name: how about "Snowtop"?

Meanwhile the **North Thames Ministerial Training Course** has moved, to: The Crypt, St George-in-the-East, 16 Cannon Street Road, London. With the increased 'topping' of riverside footpaths

in the area at high tide, the crypt may not be the best place for the course to stay afloat! Nonetheless, its website is dry:

<http://www.ntmtc.org.uk/index.html>

Newly elected to the CHRISM Committee, *Mike Rayner* may already be familiar to readers in connection with a report released in September on "*fat taxes*". According to the study, published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, more than 3,000 fatal heart attacks and strokes could be prevented in the UK each year if VAT was slapped on a vast range of foods. A 17.5% rise on fatty, sugary or salty food would cut heart and stroke deaths by 1.7%.

Mike told the press: "This is still at a fairly early stage, but the time is right for more debate on the issue of 'fat taxes'. The other thing which would have to be done is to look at the possibility of subsidies for healthier foods, rather than simply looking at increases in tax."

Secular gifts in the Church's service!

To balance the comments in an earlier item, St. Andrew's, Higher Blackley, nestling to the north side of Manchester, has enlisted the expertise in marketing of a member of its congregation, Richard Morris, who was a member of the team that successfully marketed the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

Richard has invented a fictional character, Stan Drew, with the aim of making the church and Christianity more accessible to youngsters in the area. Free T shirts and being distributed, with "Stan Drew" on the front, and "Matt, Mark, Like, Johnny and Stan" on the back. It is intended to extend the range of clothing, including to hoodies!

The Christmas section

The mince pies made an appearance in our local Sainsbury's in September! So it isn't too early to add some items for Christmas.

Why have a mere angel atop your *Christmas tree*, when you can buy – for \$24 – a figure of Jesus, from Christian Dollar? "If I be

lifted up I will draw all men unto Me. It is truly beautiful. Top quality, real silk gown, made of resin, nail prints in hands, and 12" tall. Lights up when plugged in. King of Glory. Hollow in center. Not sold anywhere else, our own patented design. Can be used all year round, even Easter."

Not to be out-done, another US producer, Toy Lounge, will sell you a *bobble-head Jesus* or *Mary* for just \$18.95! Or if you prefer a more traditional – and British - Christmas present, try a *Lord of the Kings* jigsaw, from Christian Publicity Organisation, Worthing.

The Crofter's Christmas Eve lullaby

This one is for Dorrie Johnson, who entertained us with the theology of 'mouse' a few years ago, and Jim Cummins, the nearest CHRISM has to a Crofter. It comes from Sweden.

Seven stars are ablaze in the black Christmas sky
While the hungry cat's pacing and whining.
Seven children together in one bed lie -
Their father has left without warning.

Seven berries with breadcrumbs was today's special treat
And whey in our porridge this evening.
The nearest you'll get to sweet cakes and fine meat
Is in bed, empty-stomached and dreaming.

Seven rats in the cellar are having a feast,
In the loft it's the mice's Christmas.
Tomorrow no doubt we'll have nothing to eat
But a couple of mouldy old biscuits.

Seven candles are lit on the altar in church
To celebrate God's incarnation,
And those who have fine clothes and collars well starched
Take their seats in the congregation.

Seven angels with instruments shining like gold
Grace the organ in frozen perfection,
While farmers and gentry in the pews down below

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*Our faith imposes on us a right and a duty to throw ourselves
into the things of the earth*

Teilhard de Chardin