

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.

CHRISM is the National Association of CHRistians In Secular Ministry

for **all** Christians who see their secular employment as their primary Christian ministry, and for those who support that vision.

To further this aim, CHRISM publishes a quarterly journal, releases occasional papers and organises an annual retreat. Conferences are held regularly and worldwide links pursued.

CHRISM welcomes members, both lay and ordained, from all Christian denominations, encourages them to be active within their own faith communities and to champion ministry in and through secular employment. If you would like confidential support as an MSE, please contact any member of the Committee (see inside rear cover).

Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or other members of the Committee.

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EDITORIAL

This is my last edition as Editor. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to fulfil this role – albeit for a short time. There is no doubt opinions vary about whether or not a paper based journal should continue or be transferred to an electronic format. Reasons around the accessibility and cheap production of electronic versions carry little weight when considering those who have no computer or a bad internet access.

Neither electronic nor paper based versions cater for those who can neither read nor see – nor those who do not speak or read the English language. There are always pros and cons for any format and no one version will answer the needs of everyone. In the end compromises have to be made and assessments of the ‘typical’ reader will usually be one of the main deciding factors – along with production cost and availability of volunteer editorial skills.

Although contributions for the journal are always welcome and sought, the content of each edition is increasingly fed by a very few members – usually from the CHRISM committee. Verbal feedback from recipients of the journal largely gives positive messages but the purpose of the

journal has to be questioned if so few contribute. Perhaps the journal should focus on themes, training, news from and about similar organisations rather than be a miscellany of bits and pieces which, though interesting, give a particular flavour to each edition.

Such are some of my reflections after my experience as Editor. The next lucky incumbent of the role will be elected at the CHRISM AGM at Birmingham on July 16th. If you would like to be nominated for the role of Editor of the CHRISM Journal Ministers at Work please contact Margaret our CHRISM Secretary whose details are on the inside cover of this edition.

I hope you enjoy this edition and I wish you well for the future.

Peter Johnson

Christians in Parliament report: Clearing the Ground
Christians in Parliament is an official All-Party Parliamentary Group, chaired by Gary Streeter, MP for Devon South West, and includes MPs and Peers from the three major parties and from a range of Christian traditions. In February this year it

published 'Clearing the Ground' - a preliminary report of the committee's findings into the freedoms of Christians within UK public life.

The Clearing the Ground inquiry was set up in the light of high profile court cases and media reports suggesting Christians are marginalised in the UK, and considered the question: Are Christians marginalised in the UK? The inquiry sought to determine the extent of problems faced by Christians, what caused them, and what needed to be done in response. The aims of the inquiry were:

- to clarify the situation that Christians in the UK face in their everyday lives
- to identify any particular challenges that Christians face, and what aspects of legislation have created challenges
- to identify what changes could be made to address these challenges
- to encourage Christians to continue to make positive contributions to all aspects of society

The inquiry took oral evidence in three sessions from key organisations, denominations and experts. Written evidence was submitted by a further 40 groups and individuals. The full report and all the evidence can be found online at www.eauk.org/clearingtheground.

The report begins by emphasising that Christians are not persecuted in the UK; indeed to infer that they are does an injustice to Christians in situations of overt persecution and repression. There have been recent cases widely reported in the media, some coming before a court or tribunal, which suggest a narrowing of the freedom of Christians to express their faith. Some of the legal hearings, associated campaigning and media coverage are seen as unwise and possibly counter-productive to the positive role that Christians play in society.

The problems that Christians face are far from universal, but they do represent a trend towards a reduction in the space given to belief in public life. As a result this leads to an assumption that religious belief should be a private activity. The key findings of the report are summarised as follows: There is a growing level of religious illiteracy in the UK, leading to a lack of understanding of Christianity and faiths in general.

This has led to an increasing lack of tolerance, despite official moves to recognise and educate for the increasing plurality of society over the past 60 years or so. Recently this has expressed itself in restrictions on how faith can be expressed, in public life and in the workplace.

The inquiry made the following specific observations:

the Equality Act 2010 fails to deal with the tensions between different strands of equality policy

Court decisions have relegated religious beliefs below other strands and effectively created a hierarchy of rights

the place of religious belief suffers because companies, institutions and the government do not take sufficient action to accommodate it

the 1986 Public Order Act, and specifically Section 5, places the bar too low through its prohibition on insulting language. (The report notes that 'insulting' is not the same as 'abusive', but has on occasion been interpreted as such)

the policing of the Public Order Act and other legislation demonstrates a lack of understanding of what is a legitimate expression of Christian belief.

Government departments handle religious belief in a complex and confused manner and lack sufficient coordination

advice from government departments on how to handle religious belief in the public sector varies and in many cases fails to grasp the nature and implications of belief (my own

experience in a major Government department is that religious networks and groups were treated in the same way as sports or social clubs)

guidance from professional bodies on religious belief often fails to understand, and therefore safeguard, a role for belief in public life

across the UK, local authorities handle their relationships with religious groups in very different ways; some authorities demonstrate excellent understanding and cooperation, while some authorities place unnecessary barriers to wider Christian contribution

There are of course a number of recommendations, particularly on “specific and necessary steps” which the government should take. Overall the report urges national and local bodies to implement measures to enable Christians and other faiths to have greater confidence in their freedom to express their beliefs.

Many of the witnesses the committee heard from supported the introduction of statutory guidelines for reasonable accommodation. This would mean that employers and service providers have to make an effort to accommodate religious beliefs in a similar manner as they currently do with

disabilities. This sort of approach acknowledges diversity and rather than promote a single universal resolution to a situation accepts that in different cases the response may, and often should, vary. 'Reasonable accommodation' is seen as a concept that has merit and warrants further consideration.

It calls for areas of the law that permit the arrest of individuals for insulting behaviour to be significantly amended or reinforced with guidance that permits freedom for preaching and the public articulation of Christian beliefs.

Further, guidance given to local authorities on how to deal with faith groups needs to be strengthened. Specific reference is made to reaffirming that LAs should make it clear that children can be adopted and fostered by people with religious beliefs. Professional bodies too need better guidance relating to religious identity, activity and freedom. Government departments also need better guidance on accommodating religious belief and the way it works itself out in everyday life, and better coordination is needed of policy relating to religion in and across government.

Finally, the Equality and Human Rights Commission should be reviewed and restructured to better include and represent religious beliefs. (As Trevor

Phillips is stepping down as Chair, there is an opportunity to do this now).

Christians in Parliament intends to use the findings and recommendations in the report as a basis for dialogue with other faith groups on the broader question of religion in public life. The report will also be discussed with the government, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and other groups to see how the issues raised may be resolved.

The report also makes recommendations as to how the Church should respond. Many of the challenges identified are not wholly the responsibility of the government to resolve; the Church has a role to play. There is a seen to be a growing need for churches and Christian organisations to take responsibility when their actions may have contributed to a perception that the scale of the problem facing Christians is greater than it is.

Christians have, and will always, experience tensions between their beliefs and the shifting values of the societies that they live in. To some extent the present tensions should be seen as an encouragement of faithful witness. However Christians should always consider the potential impact their actions might have on politics, public

opinion and the confidence of other Christians in their mission.

I would be very interested to hear from MSEs who experienced difficulties in expressing their ministry and faith in the workplace.

My contact details are in the rear cover. Do let me know of restrictions you encounter, for example on what you are permitted to wear or say, and how you respond. Please let me know also of any positives you experience: recognition of your ministry by your employer and or colleagues.

Rob Fox

Churches and Industry Group Birmingham

An exciting opportunity where faith and work come together in Birmingham. Are you someone who:
has the vision and the capacity for connecting the Gospel with the world of economics?
can lead and expand an ecumenical team of workplace chaplains operating across a range of organisations and sectors?
is able to motivate and resource local congregations and church leaders in thinking and engaging with issues of work and economic life?

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cigbadmin@birmingham.anglican.org

Closing date for applications: 4 July 2012

Interviews on 16 July 2012 at the Business School, Aston University, Birmingham.

See our website: www.cigb.org.uk/

Informal enquiries to the Revd Stephen Willey on 0121 767 2911.

A Genuine Occupational Requirement under the Employment and Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulation 2003 applies.

CHRISM partner National Center for the Laity

CHRISM has for many years exchanged newsletters with the NCL, based in Chicago, and found it taps a rich vein of thought, expertise and information about many issues facing Christians at work and in engaging with the economic world. NCL's newsletters can be viewed on-line at: www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm, along with background and historical information. The June 2012 edition includes a review of a timely book, '*Leading wisely in difficult times*', Michael Naughton and David Specht (Paulist Press), articles on sabbath and retail, and a work prayer.

David Clark, long-time Methodist pioneer in faith and work, has set up a new website where a number of his articles can be downloaded, at <http://www.davidbclark.co.uk/articles.asp>.

David's writings have been influential in the Methodist church and beyond for many years and his concept of the 'Human City' was a prime driver in re-organising a number of circuits, notably Manchester and Birmingham, to reflect where people live and work. Also on the website is information about books and other publications and how to obtain them.

Rob Fox

CHRISM REFLECTIVE WEEKEND 2013

Giving Thanks....

.... And Breaking Bread Together

Launde Abbey, Rutland, Leicestershire

8th – 10th February 2013

We hope you can come ! Please book the date in your diary now, more details to follow in the next Journal

Pint-pulling Cleric Dies

From What's Brewing, the monthly newsletter of CamRA, the Campaign for Real Ale

February 2012

“Barrington Bennetts, who stood behind the bar of the Seven Stars pub in Falmouth for almost 50 years has died aged 79.

The atmospheric pub he ran has been in his family since the 1870s and the indefatigable Barrington loved nothing better than being the impresario behind the bar. The Seven Stars was an unspoilt, somewhat-dishevelled, Grade II-listed, two-bar, town-centre pub which features in CaMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors and has been in the Good Beer Guide.

Barrington was Assistant Priest at Falmouth parish church and part of his ministry was his beers. It was his mission to ensure that his real ales, all served straight from the barrel, were the best

quality.

Barrington was one of the few real people to have appeared as a character in the *Beano* comic. In 2002 he was portrayed as the man behind the bar in the Reverend's Pop Shop."

Now that's the sort of MSE I'd like to have met !

Rob Fox

International Worker Priest Conference Pentecost 2012

Contribution from the English Group
Companions in Humanity to live out Hope
Listen to the cry of my people
Our spirituality of seeing

In this attitude of attention we were asked to respond to four questions. This is a translation back into English of the paper which was originally written in French as our contribution to this year's Pentecost conference.

In the places we are situated, who are our companions. Our companions in work and struggle, in distress and anger, in joy ?

Phil explained : immediately after our last international meeting I learnt that the directors of our company had taken the decision to close our office in Solihull. It was a very great surprise (but that is another story). My companions were as surprised as I was !

We were eight people – a very congenial group and very engaged together. Already, during the preceding year, two of my companions had left because they had seen that such an event would happen. Others have since left – and now we are only two ! And my companion and I must work from another office in the centre of Birmingham. So, I ask the question – who now are my companions ? – they have left ! But we have kept in contact, to support one another through these many changes, and to help each other find new work – but in the end, everyone must chose the direction which is best for them.

We had no power to resist the change – we were not even consulted about the change. But we are not alone – three further offices have been closed (we have been told the correct word is not “closed” but “relocated”) – there is much sadness, distress and anger. Many other companions have also left the company.

I try to remain positive; I try to discover new companions in the office in Birmingham – but it is very difficult. Can we talk of joy ? – perhaps when we rejoice that a colleague has found new and better work elsewhere.

In the current movements: the Occupations, the “Indignados”, in the countries of North Africa, in the strikes - do we see an Other World being born ?

The “Occupy” movement in London remained for several months in front of St Paul’s Cathedral, but it was closed during March, destroyed without violence, but by the power of the City. The church was greatly compromised – who were their companions ? The people of the “Occupy” movement, or the financiers of the City of London with whom they work ?

But for those who joined in the occupation, they have spoken of a tremendous time which has changed their lives, of the significant and profound debates on politics and economics, and of the new friends and contacts made during the occupation

But have there been any profound changes ? – perhaps for them personally, but to the society and the governance of the world ? We do not

see anything. If anything, the other world which is arriving is a world more divided and separated – the rich and those who work, set against an under class (I resist calling them the “Classe Ouvriere”) motivated only for themselves by greed and jealousy. (We could talk more about the riots of last summer). But this under class do not organise themselves to resist, to fight for justice.

How do we contribute to the creation of resistance, locally and globally ? (“to reorganise resistance in the microscopic and the macroscopic”)

Stan spoke of a friend who organises a group from among the churches of Chesterfield which has developed a vision of “Street Pastors”. After some six months, those who have volunteered have formed an organisation and now go into the town every Saturday evening – from 11 pm until 4 in the morning. They are easily identified by their jackets. They give assistance and help those who are in distress – due largely to drinking too much alcohol. They take with them water, tissues, and spare flipflops for women who have lost their own shoes.

The Pastors collect bottles and glass from the streets; they arrange taxis for the people who wish

to return to their homes. An important aspect is that they talk with those they meet in the streets and in the bars and clubs. They pray with any who ask them to pray with them – but they are not evangelistic.

Many other organisations approve of this action and support it – the police, the owners of bars and clubs, and the local council. During these last months, since the start of the operation, there have been significant benefits to the town – behaviour has become better and there has been less demand for ambulances and emergency hospital services. There are similar groups in other towns and cities in England. They are linked through the “Ascension Trust” which organises insurance and training for those who want to join the Pastors.

With what symbolic actions do we celebrate our hope with our companions ?

Margaret spoke of the Consultative Committee or Works Council in the company where she works. She was elected to join the committee and then elected as one of the two joint presidents. She therefore did much to build up the council, its structure and its ways of working. She insisted that one of the fundamental principles is that they

should work as one committee together - all the members are involved in the same company. There would be no talk of two different and opposed groups - they would not speak of “the company” against “the workers”. The Council has gained a great deal of respect in the company. It has helped to find responses to difficult situations. And Margaret can speak directly with the Chief Executive of the business to help avoid potentially catastrophic situations. The Council is a good sign of hope for a company of companions who want to work together - that is something to celebrate !

What signs of the Gospel and of the Kingdom do we see there ?

Jesus said “the people of Nineveh demanded a sign, but the only sign they received was the sign of Jonah who spent three days in the whale”. I was writing this paper during Holy Week, in front of the cross. It is perhaps necessary to stay in the company of the cross during times of distress. During Holy Week, during the crucifixion of Jesus, no one foresaw the Resurrection ! A wise priest once gave me a little piece of paper on which is written the words: “Behind every cross, hidden for we cannot see him, stands the risen Christ”.

Phil Aspinall

Work Prayers – the Bakewell way

The Association of Bakewell Christians has produced a prayer booklet which could be used as a model for other communities, as well as containing some rather good prayers. And yes, there is a café called The Bakewell Tart. The simple structure uses a different sector of local businesses for each month of the year, January is ‘Eating Out’, November ‘Market Traders’, and so on. Each monthly page includes a list of the local businesses in that sector, preceded by a prayer. ‘Supermarkets and Food shops’ (September) is a typical example:

“We give you thanks, O God, for those in Bakewell who provide your gifts of food and drink. We thank you that, in this town, we not only have enough and more to satisfy our needs, but out blessed by choice. We pray for those who work often unsocial hours to meet our physical well-being and to ensure that we never go without. As they serve us in this important way, may we and they remember the needs of the world where so many live in hunger. As we enjoy your good gifts, may we be generous in what we offer those, near and far, who are less fortunate than ourselves.”

Producing a similar booklet where we are could be a useful way of raising awareness of the links between our faith and our work. A project for our local church perhaps?

Rob Fox

An MSE elected president in Germany

I would like to give some explanatory notes to the article about "MSE elected President" in the Journal edition of April 2012. In Germany, the President is elected by the members of the parliament and the same number of people who are appointed. I was honoured to be one of these appointed delegates.

Is the new President Joachim Gauck an MSE who is should receive praise for his engagements? His nomination was not so unanimously welcomed. Some days before the election, a group of very famous churchmen of the former DDR, who had been greatly involved in the Revolutions of 1989, made a very powerful declaration. The declaration is titled "The freedom that we meant". They criticised the false concept of freedom. The revolution wanted freedom for all, not adaption to western capitalist economics. The Churchmen stressed that they do have the same experiences with dictatorship in the DDR as Joachim Gauck. But in contrast to him they had struggled to establish more freedom and justice for all. They recalled the famous documents of the ecumenical movement for justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC). They said: "It is not enough to declare freedom without speaking about justice."

They considered his understanding of freedom to be individualistic, conservative and privileged. Gauck, they said, was speaking only about freedom from (from oppression, for example) but not about freedom for (for human rights, justice and so on). Their aim was not an adaption to the modern industrial and capitalist society but a deeper change of the patterns of living, working, producing and so on.

But Gauck is an advocate of adaption to the western society. He refused to give any criticism of the capitalist economy during the financial crisis! The churchmen stressed that Joachim Gauck was nominated mainly because of his anti-communist attitudes. Indeed, during the debates about a new president, the neoliberal Party FDP refused to consider for president the former Chairman of the Protestant Churches and the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), Wolfgang Huber.

The argument of the FDP had been: Wolfgang Huber is a man who has spoken in favour of a minimum wage (which we do not have in Germany) and tax increases (which we need). They wanted to reject both these demands and therefore the liberal Party FDP supported Joachim Gauck because of his endorsement of freedom!

He has recently initiated a new debate which also fits under his same understanding of freedom. In an interview in a famous newspaper, Gauck said that Islam would be a risk to freedom. He does welcome Muslims to be a part of Germany, but not Islam, on the grounds that Islam did not have any reformation or enlightenment. Therefore, he says, Islam would be foreign to European traditions. But that means: Gauck is welcoming the Muslim people but not their religion, their religious tradition and spirituality.

My question is: do we not need to accept people with their religion? And then perhaps we shall learn that not all Muslims are fundamentalists....

By the way: after the revolution of 1989 the president Gauck left the service of the Church and never served again...

So is he really an MSE ?

Franz Segbers

Old-catholic Priest, Frankfurt

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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