

# ***Ministers-at-Work***

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secular ministry*

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## Editorial

First of all, apologies for the delay to this edition – it seems that Holy Week and Easter threw my schedules somewhat! Anyway, now you have it.. It is an eclectic but hopefully interesting edition, drawing primarily on a series of events which have taken place over the past three months. These

have explored some helpful ideas and images in relation to ministry in secular employment, and indeed chaplaincy, notably the cave at Patmos, neither in the world nor of the monastery, the notion of busking (either the street musician or the individual apparently making it up on the spot – but is he?) and the tension between our attitudes, our intentions and our circumstances. You are also warmly invited to join us in Guildford in July for our Annual Conference, at which we are pleased to be able to welcome the Bishop of Guildford and also the new Bishop for MSE, the Bishop of Ludlow, Rt Revd Alistair Magowan.

Just now in the secular world we are faced with so many challenges. After the initial shocking impact of first Christchurch and then Colombo on our awareness of wider issues of hate crime and discrimination, we heard the strong voices of the Extinction Rebellion protestors alongside 16 year old Greta Thunberg reminding us that our planet's future is seriously compromised. Yet we continue to focus on the apparent shortcomings and self-destructive tendencies of our democratic system as we wrestle with the chaos that is Brexit (whichever way we voted), and its impact across our lives..

I have recently been looking at pictures of bridges: they seem a particularly important idea at a time when there are so many fractures and ravines in our society. So many different places to stand - and so much difficulty in understanding or hearing people with different views. Yet if we don't try to build bridges, we will each find ourselves inhabiting splinters of land with limited potential. Only when we work together - in organisations, in communities and as a nation - will we be able to come close to the hope we see in God's Kingdom – or to

help to bring others to that place. I believe we have an important role in listening and facilitating in the many places we are set - and building bridges which our colleagues, neighbours and friends can cross.



*Pauline Pearson*

## **An Introduction.....from your incoming Moderator – Joe Smith**

My name is Joe Smith, I have been an Ordained Priest in the Church of England since 2008.

I was baptised as a Roman Catholic and received a Catholic education before undertaking a Theology degree at what was Westminster College, Oxford, (now part of Oxford Brookes University) a Methodist college above the city from 1992-1995.

Following this I read for a Masters' degree in Church History and Ethics at the University of Exeter the following year. Various jobs followed, including working for the local Bournemouth Echo and ADVERTISER series and briefly Bournemouth libraries before I went to work for the Church Army in Lowestoft between 2000-2002.

It was an incredibly rewarding job working in local parishes and the Church Army's residential home Harleston House with older people very much in a pastoral and supportive way. I still have good friends from all those years ago.

On returning to Bournemouth after the home was taken over, I ran a Bowling green facility for the local authority as a franchisee before working for a nursing agency, a stint in St Ann's Psychiatric hospital, where two of my patients were lads my age who had been to school with me- that was hard!

I returned to Bournemouth libraries in 2005 eventually in several managerial roles often in tough estate library branches where there was often social deprivation and in the town centre library which also had big social issues, particularly homelessness and drug abuse and the occasional fracas between overseas students! It was at this time I also began working for the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, once a family home it was given to the Borough of Bournemouth around 1920.

I was selected for training for the ministry after a conference at Shallowford house, in Staffordshire (where next February's CHRISM conference will be!) and trained through the STETS scheme at Sarum College in Salisbury.

My current job began with the Home Library Service, a domiciliary library vehicle visiting people in sheltered, nursing, and residential homes and day centres in 2010 as a Senior Management secondment which I returned to as a temporary measure in 2014 (I am still there!) In many ways it has echoes of my time at Harleston House and is very rewarding indeed, as a great ministry in that many of my readers are parishioners in the various parishes I practice in.

My curacy began at St Mark's Talbot Village and was completed at St Aldhelm's, Branksome. I have a licence to officiate for both the Diocese of Salisbury and Winchester, currently actively taking many services and courses at 5 churches in the Bournemouth area across the two dioceses.

Workwise there are many challenges ahead as Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch have merged into one council, this month, all starting from very different points, making us the 12th largest populated authority in the country with a population now the size of Bristol with huge pressures on staff and resources which will only become more acute as government funding continues to be cut.

I look forward to our time together as members of CHRISM.

## **Wellbeing: More than a matter of Circumstance – Ann Morisy**

Richard Layard, the economist who has pioneered work on wellbeing and wealth, makes a case that is almost shocking in its simplicity: Even for those who are only moderately

financially secure, more money brings disappointment.<sup>1</sup> More and more money is a let-down, so research repeatedly shows. Layard suggests two reasons for this disenchantment: He highlights 'habituation' as one of the reasons why the anticipated delight associated with high earnings or a windfall dulls quite quickly. Basically we get used to what we have and the lifestyle associated with wealth becomes routine. The second factor that Layard identifies is that of status anxiety. We cannot resist comparing our circumstances with others: rivalry is hard to resist. So, rather than relax in financial security, we find ourselves having to negotiate a new batch of worries about losing out on the advantages that others have secured. In other words, we rarely assess our circumstances objectively, but rather we assess them in comparison with others. The work of positive psychologists suggests that circumstances matter, but not as much as we think. There is an inclination to cede too much potency to 'circumstances' in making sense of our lives, 'circumstances' have acquired a more potent status in our life script than is warranted. This inclination to overestimate the power of circumstances has its roots in what psychologists refer to as 'the focusing illusion', i.e. Nothing in life is quite as important as you think it is while you are thinking about it. "The focusing illusion helps explain why the results of well-being research are often counter-intuitive. The false intuitions may arise from a failure to recognize that people do not continuously think about their circumstances, whether positive or negative - Nothing in life is quite as important as you think it is while you are thinking about it. Individuals who have recently experienced a significant life change (e.g. becoming

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<sup>1</sup> See Layard R. (2005) Happiness: Lessons from a New Science pub. Allen Lane

disabled, winning a lottery, or getting married) surely think of their new circumstances many times each day, but the allocation of attention eventually changes, so that they spend most of their time attending to and drawing pleasure or displeasure from experiences such as having breakfast or watching television ... For example an experiment in which students were asked: (i) "How happy are you with your life in general?" and (ii) "How many dates did you have last month?" The correlation between the answers to these questions was  $-0.012$  (not statistically different from 0) but when they were asked in the reverse order, the correlation rose to  $0.66$  with another sample of students. (By asking) The dating question first, this evidently caused that aspect of life to become salient and its importance to be exaggerated when the respondents encountered the more general question about their happiness".<sup>2</sup>

For sure, circumstances matter, but not as much as we think. We have come to cede too much potency to 'circumstances' in making sense of our lives. In our culture 'circumstances' have acquired a more potent status in our life script than is warranted leading us to underestimate the scope we have for 'intentional activity'.

The surprise is how little impact 'circumstances' have on people's wellbeing. Research by Lyubomirsky, Sheldon &

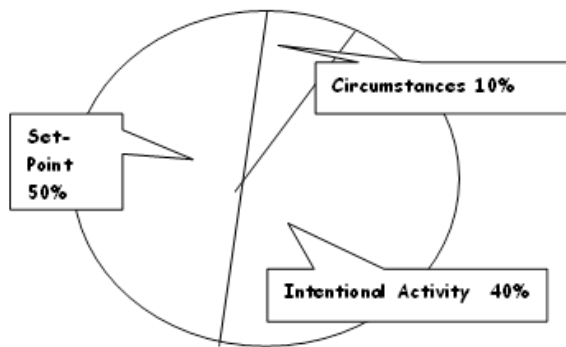
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<sup>2</sup> Kahneman D., Krueger A.B., Schkade D., et al. (2006). Would you be happier if you were richer? A focusing illusion. *Science*, 312, 1908-1910. (Article available at <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/312/5782/1908>)



Schkade<sup>3</sup> suggests just ten percent<sup>4</sup>. If we can get the motivation to engage in positive or meaningful intentional activities, circumstances associated with health, money, and even upbringing have a surprisingly small impact on wellbeing. So for example, lottery winners are unlikely to be any happier one year after their win.

There are three things that have been identified as having an impact on wellbeing:



The set point comes from our genes. Our genes play a significant part in whether, in this context, whether we are upbeat or prone to gloom. This doesn't mean that those with gloomy genes can never be happy, just that when happy the gloomy genes are prone to pull us back to our 'set-point'. This potent model suggests we are inclined to over-rate the impact of circumstances and underestimate the significance of our 'agency' (i.e. our ability to engage in meaningful intentional

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<sup>3</sup> S. Lyubomirsky, K M Sheldon, & D Schkade (2005) "Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change," Review of General Psychology, Special Issue: Positive Psychology 9 (20): 111-131

<sup>4</sup> This low percentage is contested, but nevertheless the percentage remains less than 25%

activities), and it is this that helps to account for the effectiveness of religious commitment and practice in coaching and sustaining change in people's lives. The commitment to follow Jesus in the way he lived his life, is a major contributor to empowerment which enables a sense of purpose to flourish. Embracing a faith impacts our attitude to our circumstances, and when our attitudes change so too do the micro-actions in which we engage. Victor Frankl, who concluded from his experiences in Auschwitz that in the last resort "everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." Becoming a Christian is about making an effort to choose one's attitude to one's circumstances.

## **A Busker's Reflection - Margaret Trivasse**

My friend and I went busking on four or five occasions a few years ago. He plays hurdy-gurdy and I sing along. To have an entire weekend reflecting on busking as a metaphor for MSE was a fascinating prospect. Jim Francis went into great breadth and depth in his exploration of the image and its implications but I will confine myself to his identified "Marks of Busking" and relate them to my experience both as busker and MSE. The first mark was location. We performed in both Whitby and Bury, largely due to where we each of us lives. Within those towns, though, the location was very important and we moved from place to place. Where were most people passing or congregating? Where were we sufficiently prominent to be noticed but not so prominent as to be obstructive? We were even thrown off a shopping precinct by three security guards!

My work location is in a Community Mental Health Team. In recent months I've been in an open-plan office (when not with individual clients) rather than being shut away in a room on my own. Very few of my colleagues know I'm ordained. As this becomes known, there may be reactions and responses. As an anonymous busker, I am ephemeral. None of my clients know I'm ordained, and yet it is with them that I sometimes have conversations about God.

Mark two was responsiveness and adaptability. As buskers, we were well-prepared. We practised beforehand, making sure that the hurdy-gurdy emitted a note which I could pitch comfortably. My memory being feeble, I had sheets of words for the songs I sang. On the one occasion we got a request, we couldn't fulfil it since it wasn't a song we knew; we weren't able to be very adaptable, other than adjusting our repertoire a little if we perceived a response, positive or negative. As MSE, I've had very few significant conversations with colleagues directly related to spiritual matters. However, I think that virtually all my sessions with clients are busking!

Person-centred counsellors use ourselves, and respond to the material the client brings. I never know how a session will turn out beforehand, and don't have a firm plan. I do adapt to what the client says, including on matters of faith, whatever the client's background.

Provisionality, being "in the moment" (the third mark), is related to that. Our busking encounters depended on us being in the right time and place. The hurdy-gurdy drew a lot of interest. On one occasion we simply seemed to meet many generous people who contributed to our charity box. We would not be there the next day.

MSE encounters similarly are about being in the right place at the right time for an individual. Busking has infinite variety and no set rules. The MSE has the freedom to create, not to be bound by the Church's idea of what a minister should be. There are, of course, rules in secular institutions but the very presence of an MSE may be significant.

The final mark which Jim suggested was that of courage and perseverance. Busking as a musician requires the taking of risks, and of perseverance, particularly when the weather is bad and the passers-by unresponsive. I never had the courage to do without my words sheets and don't have the skills nor confidence to improvise.

At work, it is a risk to reveal oneself as a Christian, particularly an ordained one. The work itself is challenging and raises questions: what does the gospel have to say to people who have suffered appalling abuse or live in great poverty with a minimal chance of work or who experience racism? Perhaps I am more able to improvise in this context. This leads to my final comment about the experience of being a busker, and an area which Jim did not develop.

My friend and I busk because we enjoy it! We love making music and performing and entertaining. How does this aspect of the metaphor relate to MSE? Is there any role for entertainment or performance?! Perhaps that's where my passion for my job comes in. I hope that my song is that of God's love for all people.

## Busking MSE? Rob Fox

The key theme Jim Francis used in his excellent leading of us at the recent Reflective weekend was 'Busking MSE', which led me to think: how apt is the analogy? Do MSE 'busk' their ministry? The conclusion I came to is yes and no. Let me explain.

We have all encountered buskers, in town centres, at rail and tube stations (sometimes on the trains!), on beaches, in parks. Like MSEs they come in all shapes and sizes – musicians, mime artists, balloon twisters, contortionists, acrobats, story tellers, puppeteers, jugglers, actors ... I'm sure you can think of more. With all these expressions of busking, what is it that enables us to recognise the activity as busking? I see the characteristics as:

- It is public. Busking takes place in a public place (yes, I know a busker might be hired to do, say, a children's party, but that is because they've been seen in public). MSE ministry is also



public; it is seldom what people might think of public Christian ministry (hatch, match and despatch) but it is done in public. There are important differences in how MSE is public, as I develop below.

- It is located. Busking takes place in a particular place that affords it impact. It is aimed at an audience so buskers will look for the places that enable them to reach it. Some of these places are in high demand and it is not unknown for turf wars to break out when a busker finds a competitor has grabbed their usual spot. Buskers were recently up in arms when Transport for London changed the busking slot booking system on the London Underground (online booking for one or two hours!)

- It is intentional. Buskers (and I know a few) seldom just turn up and decide what they'll do that day. It is planned. Yes a busker may tweak the repertoire to appeal to the immediate audience, but it isn't done 'on the hoof'.

- It is purposeful. Buskers do it for a reason. Sometimes it is purely to entertain, but usually it is for money, to draw attention to something (trail a concert or play) or to gain experience in public performance.

- It is engaging. In one sense at least. It seeks to engage our attention, as without this it will not succeed in its purpose.

- It is peripheral. Busking is not 'embedded' in the lives of the audience, notwithstanding that we may consciously go to a spot where a performer we have seen many times before will be performing. At best the audience stay a few minutes, maybe

engage in a bit of banter, toss a few coins in the hat, and move one. Mostly we pass by barely noticing.

How is that similar to or different from MSE?

MSE is also public in that it is something that acts in a space open to others. The number and scope of others is restricted by the circumstances of employment or context, but it is public, and in a different way to busking.

Similarly, MSE is located. Generally that location is well-defined – an office, school, hospital, business – but often it is less well marked out. Think here of the consultant, who engages with a wide variety of clients in many places. The location may also be virtual, definable by network or context rather than geographic space.

MSE is intentional, in that we are conscious of the ministry to which we are called, and that it is integral with the work we do and the context in which we do it. Put another way, we are intentionally ministering in a work, community or other non-church context as we believe that is what God has called us to do. How we minister will vary according to context, our role and the needs we see around us and respond to

MSE is purposeful, in that our ministry shares the purpose of our work, not just what we do but how we do it. The main difference here with busking is we don't do it for our own benefit. With occasional exceptions, the purpose of busking is to benefit the busker or that which they are promoting. 'Hot' busking spots can earn a busker several hundred pounds a day; I've seen buskers selling self-produced CDs; if training a performance, busking helps add to the paying audience. MSE is

for the benefit of those among whom we work and the context in which we work. It is outward facing service. MSE is engaging. If we don't engage with those we work alongside, those who benefit from our work, those who sustain our work, we can't do our job or minister effectively. With some exceptions – the self-employed consultant come to mind again – we don't need to drum up this engagement, it comes with our working role. We do though need to nurture and value it.

MSE isn't peripheral, in the way busking is, but is embedded, part of, the activity and context. In that respect I suggest that what goes on in the church building on a Sunday morning, where (in most cases) a few dozen souls from a parish of thousands gather to participate in an often lack-lustre performance, accompanied by passing the plate around to garner what a decent busker could in half an hour at the foot of Grey's Monument in the centre of Newcastle, is more akin to busking than MSE is. Apart from being public, that is. It is the churches that are increasingly peripheral to everyday life, hidden away from public view.

Going back to the original tentmaker, we can see points of similarity with and difference to MSE in Paul's ministry. When he went down to speak with the dyers on the riverside outside Philippi, and stood up to speak in the Areopagus in Athens, Paul was busking. A chosen site, responding to the hearers, there for a specific purpose. When the silversmiths of Ephesus had Paul arrested he had been there for two years, influencing the congregation and city, doing what an MSE does. When he worked alongside Priscilla and Aquila, cutting and sewing leather, it was as an MSE, working and ministering alongside others.



MSEs will, I think, find themselves busking theology, some more than others. I'd like to suggest that it is some expressions of Chaplaincy (airports, retail, Industrial Mission) which is more like busking than MSE, chiefly as encounters are more likely to be shirt and short-term than for MSEs.

The most important point for me is that no expression of ministry is of greater value than any other. All are important in the churches' ministry and we need them all to tell the good news of God's Kingdom. As Paul put it, he was all things to all people, using whichever means was most appropriate to communicate the Gospel where he was, where God had called him. Rapping the Gospel anyone?

## **Beyond Boundaries – Oxford February 2019**



A conference which aimed to draw together SSM Officers and other interested parties from across England took place in

Oxford on 27<sup>th</sup> February this year. It sought to acknowledge that when we operate within boundaries, their structures and shapes can be comforting – and used knowingly and unknowingly to shape the way we live. The organisers suggested that sometimes for SSMs we need to confront and redefine the boundaries we work with...

The plenary session was delivered by Bishop Sarah Mullaly, Bishop of London – who somewhat tongue in cheek described herself as a failed SSM (she had commenced her ministry as an SSM, whilst working as England's Chief Nurse.) She introduced her perspective with reference to Paul who had made tents along with Priscilla and Acquilla.. Phoebe a deacon and a benefactor.. and priests she had met in Zimbabwe who had lost stipends and pensions but were looking at entrepreneurial opportunities. She noted that none of these people defined ministry by way in which it is rewarded or not, and that its value lay in gifts far greater than could be measurable in financial terms..

She said that it was unfortunate that the finance of the C of E means that there is more dependence on SSM. It is also easier to count in terms of pay than for what is God calling us to do and how that can best be enabled. Those of us who come in doing other things bring some specific gifts: Untapped potential - real experience in the real world – and practical theology. She noted that skills and expertise from other careers could really help us in the church.. In transformational work we bring other skills – the secular world has worked out before the church that people bring more experiences to bear.. In transformational and transitional work, connections in the wider community offer untapped potential. We also provide



the possibility for people to see others more like themselves undertaking ordained roles and open up the church to people.

Bishop Sarah commented that SSMs were bridge builders - communicators - translators of the church - better rooted in the world - living life on the edge - in between. She referred to a book on healthcare chaplaincy by Christopher Moody 1999 referring to

the cave half way up the hill at Patmos where John is said to have written his Revelation - at the top is the monastery and at the bottom the world – the cave is no more or less Holy but in between - suggesting that chaplains should have the courage to occupy this place in between and travel between the two. She suggested that SSM too should occupy with confidence that place in the middle. Those on the edges or the margins are able to stand back and see the wider picture – it is on the edges where people encounter Jesus. We struggle at times to deal with the complexities of our world and its culture – inhabiting an in between place helps.

She went on to say that as a society we are spiritual but no longer Christians – SSM can be translators not just for world but for church.. A gift to the church.. We should occupy that place more courageously, a place of vision and transformation. The church does not understand what SSM bring but it is our

responsibility to translate it: Managing her DoH budget was seen as important by the church, but the really important thing was her experience out in the world and for example knowing what it was to be a Christian and a manager.

Bishop Sarah suggested that we need to equip and encourage people to translate the gifts they bring. We need to open up what we mean by vocation - the myriad of vocations people have.. No two SSM have the same vocation - but neither do any two SM. Training needs to include opportunities for reflecting on secular work, and attention to boundary setting, working agreements etc. How do we equip people? What are we called to? Bishop Sarah was called to nursing - then SSM – to be chief nurse, civil servant and priest. We don't have the language. What are we called to be by God and what does it look like – and what does the church call you out to be?

We need to offer recognition and value. At times she hadn't felt valued. But her value is found in God. The church for the future has to understand better the nature of the gifts that it is offered. It has always depended on tentmakers – it needs to change the way it looks at boundaries to value them more.

*Revd Dr Jenny Gage* presented her research under the title 'Valued for what we are'. She had undertaken it to try to work out what it is to be a priest but also called to secular work as part of that vocation - part of building the kingdom - *misseo dei*. She identified four narratives out of a process of cooperative enquiry:

- What does it mean to be a priest in the secular?
- Does our being priests make any difference to how we do our secular jobs?

- How does who we are and what we do proclaim Christ to the world?
- What is the role of the SSM in the church?

She noted that priesthood is less something we do and more something we are, asking how do we participate in priesthood of Christ? How do we enable and nurture the relationship between Christ and the world? And how would we like the church to recognise and value SSM ministry?

In discussion, those present agreed that incarnation is a key element of it - the going back and forth - at the end of a working week - offering everything we do through Christ to the Father. It was noted that we minister in many different places – and mimic what people experience who are in the pews.. Asking what makes an SSM different to any other disciple of God – individuals noted that they might be bringing the spiritual into decisions about huge numbers of people - some aware and others not that they were a priest... seeing God in the work of all creation.. We all do it in different ways..

A SM had found themselves doing an SSM MDR for a colleague working in the oil industry – with month at a time in Azerbaijan- quite monastic and empty – they asked what does it mean to be a priest when all the normal structures are absent? In discussion it was felt that this applies quite widely – that they are sacramental in that place - a priest outside the church. A counsellor felt that they were making God explicit without mention – through loving.

Echoing Bishop Sarah, someone said we were bridge builders and translators- helping the church out of the trenches of fear... as someone not in the church trenches but helping church to engage with the world... It was also noted that it was

important to be in messy places and interpret – for example working ‘inside the wire’ at an MoD establishment - being able to encourage others in that place - to pray and support others.. important - people who are trying to do their best for the nation and reflect.. God is in this place too... Nothing is ‘clean’ otherwise we are missing that God is present in all of that. This challenges our language - what do we mean by religious talk? Conversations in the workplace consider what are our values? How should we be doing this? This is not just us, but we have the tools. Creating the culture of a workplace was also important. Listening, recognising the contributions of others and their importance – as part of what we are. How do we establish identity and purpose? Belonging? Inclusivity is fundamental.

In a final session, concluding discussion highlighted the desire for a future in which SSM with their feet in world would be normative; where work focused ministry would be valued – and its potential realised; where what people are called to do in the world would be more known; and a church in which SSMs might have a ministry of oversight and encouragement- helping people to flourish.

Arising from the different strands of discussion, the conference organisers identified some potential actions:

- The first step was intended to be to establish a formal National Network of SSM Advisors to establish links and share knowledge, good practice and resources.
- There were strong voices asking for increased SSM visibility - for example in the appointment of a bishop with genuine SSM experience supported by a National Advisor

- An SSM Questionnaire was being gradually used by dioceses to inform debate – it was available across dioceses. It was thought this would also offer support for diocesan strategic planning in respect of SSM capacity and profile.
- It is hoped that the next National SSM Advisors Conference will be in 2020 and will include an international perspective.

## **Meeting of SSM Officers at Oxford**

It was a delight to be invited to attend the SSM national day in Oxford. This because, Guildford Diocese to which I belong, does not have an SSM officer and does not support these conferences. As the current moderator of Chrism, I was pleased to lend a listening ear to what content there might be for MSE.

It was a delight to hear the Bishop of London, Bishop Sarah Mullaly provide the keynote address. Bp. Sarah was herself an MSE, trained on one of the schemes – there is hope for us all!! It felt warm and welcoming to be so addressed. It felt affirming to hear such a prominent member of our church speak so highly of SSMs and MSEs and to encourage us in our endeavours.

I also found the session on the Public Square enlightening. At the very start we went around the table to ascertain who was there – what industries were represented by our presence and



how did we take the message of God into the public space?? This was of course only one of three sessions on this subject so taking a view across the whole conference would be more



than interesting. People shared their concerns for justice and righteousness. Their concerns about the church's propensity for behaving with begging bowls towards the many small businesses of this land. How sadly, some have declined to work further for the church organisation at all because of it!!

With so many SSMs also being active in their workplace environments the whole message of how we take the gospel into the world by our work and our deeds in everyday life is paramount. Of course, the conference, spent some time examining the ministry of those SSMs in parishes too. The question of 'voluntary' work over ordained calling and how we were used within the organisational context. It was all heartening and affirming if depressing in terms of the state of our nation.

As always, I am left thinking – with so much enthusiasm, and so much 'calling' – what is God about?? And how good to be part of it!!

*Ruth Brothwell*

## **Being A Feral Priest**



*I came across this post, dated 25th Jan on a blog “Unadulterated Love” written by Colin Coward, a now-retired priest and psychotherapist. The concept of “feral priest” struck me forcibly as a concept underpinning much of Ministry in Secular Employment. So the article is reprinted here, with Colin’s permission, and acknowledging his original source of the idea in the blog of his Spiritual Director, Henry Morgan, on the website of the Annunciation Trust, 12th Nov 2018. I hope it stimulates further discussion.*

*Phil Aspinall*

My last conversation was with my spiritual director. He stunned me by revealing that he had returned his Permission to Officiate to his bishop in the autumn, describing himself in the accompanying letter as a feral priest.

The idea came from the title of George Monbiot’s book about the re-wilding of moorland areas – ‘Feral’, Monbiot’s definition of ‘feral’ being “in a wild state, especially after escape from captivity or domestication.” A feral priest is one called by God to escape the captivity of the institutional Church.

My spiritual director has written that as a feral priest he had to learn a different set of skills. He had to learn to place his trust in God where previously the unstated assumption was that he should trust the institution and its leaders. He also had to learn to trust himself, his own intuitive sense of what priesthood meant. He talks about ‘internalised’ priesthood, the state in which he has learnt to trust that because God called him there must be something essentially ‘priestly’ about him.

Jesus, of course was ‘feral’. He exercised his ministry on the edge of, or outside the religious institution in which he had grown up, and by implication challenged it. Increasing numbers

of men and women today do the same, and not just priests, indeed mainly not priests. There are large numbers of 'feral Christians' on the loose.

Richard Holloway has spoken about feeling himself to be part of a church 'in exile'. To be 'in exile' in a Biblical sense carries overtones of being cast out against one's will, excluded from what feels like home, and sent to a place to which one does not want to go and where one feels a stranger. It's a place of pain. To go 'feral' may include experiencing all of the above, but for my spiritual director and for myself, it also means a sense of call rather than exclusion and points to a capacity for freedom and delight in what has been newly discovered.

I am discovering that to go feral is to be following a vocation in which energies are released and visions flow abundantly. I'm discovering Christians with a feral ministry, living under the radar, away from the gaze of bishops. I sense subversion in the air, people, lay and ordained, go ahead despite the bishops' rules, blessing unconditionally and distributing sacraments lavishly, as is the way of Jesus before he was tamed by the Church.

*Colin Coward*

## Tony Williamson RIP



Revd Canon Tony Williamson recently died aged 85. Tony was one of Britain's most prominent worker priests, seeing manual work in a car factory as his Christian calling. He was one of Oxford's leading Labour politicians, was Lord Mayor of the city and a trade unionist for over 60 years. He was a lifelong activist, still helping people until shortly before his death.

After his move with his wife Barbara from Cowley to Watlington in 1989 he threw himself into many aspects of town life. Easy to spot in his bright yellow jacket and yellow-and-black Mini, he was a force of nature around Watlington, and many projects in the town would have struggled without Tony's involvement.

Tony was very practical, clearing mountains of brambles from the churchyard and documenting the graves underneath, and organizing the community payback teams working in the town. He picked up new technology quickly, using a handheld palm device earlier than many younger than him.

According to those he worked with, Tony's style was to consult widely while also having a clear vision for the project at hand. Always very well-briefed, he was also determined, even stubborn in persuading others involved of the best way forward.

This approach was honed during Tony's decades as an Oxford politician and trade union negotiator but was rooted in something deeper: his lifelong Christian commitment to reach out to ordinary people and helping them however he could.

Tony was born on September 2nd 1933 in Fenny Drayton near Leicester to his father, Rev Joseph Williamson, an Anglican minister, and mother Audrey, a nanny. His father, known as Father Joe, grew up poorly educated and in poverty in east London but, against all odds gained ordination. He campaigned in Stepney, east London in the 1950s to clear slums and open safe houses for prostitutes. He was critical of what he saw as a complacent church hierarchy unconcerned about social issues. While Tony was more politically savvy than his father, he inherited Father Joe's instinct to fight social injustice and frustration with an inward-looking Church.

Father Joe was determined Tony and his two sisters would gain the education denied to him. Tony attended the private Dragon preparatory school in Oxford and Marlborough college in Wiltshire then – after national service in Egypt's Suez Canal region - studied Geography at Trinity College Oxford. He was a solid, rather than star student, also at Cuddesdon theological college near Oxford. Yet it was at Cuddesdon that his idea to work in industry took hold, inspired in part by a movement since the 1940s in France in

which hundreds of priests took factory jobs to be closer to ordinary workers.

He left Cuddesdon early to start work in 1958 at the Pressed Steel car body factory in Cowley, a dark noisy and hazardous place, far from the Oxford college life he knew. In 1960 Tony became the first-ever Anglican priest to be ordained while in factory work and without having served a curacy. A dozen workmates attended the ceremony in Christchurch cathedral.

During this time Tony helped establish the Worker Church Group (WCG), a support network for Britain's small band of worker priests. The group was concerned about what they saw as the "deep-rooted estrangement between the Church and the industrial wage earners of this country". Tony was



incensed the Church was ignoring the alienation of ordinary workers. In a sermon in London in 1961 he cited himself as one such worker: "Instead of being an individual of the utmost value to God.. I am one of 12,000 (Cowley car factory) employees, each easily replaceable, my clock number is 261092".

By this time Tony was married to Barbara. The two had known each other

in passing at Oxford university, where Barbara had also

studied, but met again in early 1959 and were married by October. Tony's 56 years of marriage to Barbara, the love and support they shared, underpinned his entire adult life. He was quick to acknowledge that she was both cleverer than him and had more refined social skills.

Their four children were born between 1960 and 1967. Tony was a loving father, less present at home than Barbara, but who tried to be home at evening mealtimes. He did house repairs and taught his children to cycle, to drive and to play numerous sports.

Tony saw his factory job as his base for his worker priest role. He was no missionary and he saw the idea of some of his WCG colleagues of 'identifying' with factory workmates as unrealistic. Rather, he sought ways in which, as he put it he "could be of use to others". He saw his task as solving problems and got involved in trade unions and local politics, becoming a pioneer in these fields more than any of the other British worker priests.

Within the car plant Tony helped union representatives of the Transport & General Workers' Union (TGWU) with paperwork and membership organization. In the early 1970s he was among union leaders involved in a prolonged dispute over pay structures, and in 1971 was elected chairman of the TGWU branch in the factory – at the time the largest in the country with over 6,000 members. He remained chairman until leaving the factory in 1987.

Tony was first elected an Oxford city councilor in 1961 and remained one almost continuously until 1988. He campaigned for more social housing and organized political support and

finance for building thousands of council houses in poorer communities. In the 1980s he represented Blackbird Leys, working to address social problems many residents faced.

As Lord Mayor in 1982-83 he pursued his worker priest approach despite the pomp of the role, clocking in at the factory at 7.15am every morning and prioritizing mayoral visits to municipal rubbish collectors and other less glamorous professions.

Tony dedicated many years to planning, education and other issues on Oxfordshire County Council, of which he was joint leader in the mid-1980s. In 2017 the Council made him an honorary alderman, its highest honour.

While in Cowley Tony held services regularly at St Luke's, a church built for workers from the nearby factories. To foster community ties he organized annual Industrial Sundays, which involved bringing a Morris Minor car into the church. Tony always acknowledged his religious approach during his 59 years as a priest was not deeply theological but rather rooted in a Christian Socialist drive to make society a better place.

In 1989, aged 56, Tony took his first office job, becoming Diocesan director of education for over 270 church schools in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. He helped modernize the education service during a period of change and consolidation.

In his later years in Watlington Tony became a full-time carer for Barbara after her severe stroke in 2011. He learnt to cook and care for her and they remained active together. He was involved in Age Concern, in managing the town hall and in



trade union work. He supported younger clergy in need through his role as a union representative for the Faith Worker' branch of Unite. He was involved in a union case in the weeks before he died.

After Barbara's death in 2015, Tony, aged 83, remarried, finding happiness with Jill Sweeny, a local family friend. Jill passed away in 2018.

Tony had been diagnosed with prostate cancer. He died peacefully at home on February 12. He is survived by his four children Ruth, Paul, Hugh and Ian and eight grandchildren.

Let him rest in peace.

*Hugh Williamson*

## **Further sad news**

We have recently been informed of the sad news that after a brief illness, Peter Johnson, a former Moderator and committee member whose work (largely in education and higher education) was mainly in the South West died in December. An appreciation will follow.

## Forthcoming Events

### ***What's good about work?* CHRISM Conference & AGM July 19th – 21st 2019**



Saint Columba's House is an urban contemporary Christian retreat and conference centre just 30 minutes by train from the heart of London and a mile from the centre of Woking.

Newly refurbished and with en-suite facilities, Saint Columba's House is the venue for the Summer 2019 CHRISM conference.

What's good about work? We shall be looking at what you do day by day - and how you understand this as your ministry. Come and explore the work you do day-by-day in the company of colleagues with the same objectives, relate it to theological ideas and see what it says about good work – and ministry in secular employment. Please come and join us!!

As always, our conference will include visits to places of work in the neighbourhood. Woking is a thriving centre which came into real existence with the coming of the railways. Nearby Guildford is the county's market town. It includes the Surrey Research Park, a major centre of excellence in technology, science, health and engineering which is widely regarded as the best science park of its kind in the UK. There are also Business

Parks, a major teaching hospital and major retail centres in both towns. With excellent rail links to London this area has long been part of the commuter ‘stock-broker’ belt.

Join us – to find out what is good about the work we do.

## Book review

*Building Kingdom Communities ... with the diaconate as a new order of mission*, David Clark, Easyprint Publishing, 2016; ISBN 978-178456-311-0; £6.99; 229 pages. Obtainable from [www.fast-print.net/bookshop](http://www.fast-print.net/bookshop).

Very much in tune with David’s work within the Kingdom @ Work Project, this book applies the same principles to the issue of building Kingdom Communities. In a rapidly changing world, where new types of community are rapidly growing alongside, and often displacing, ‘traditional’ forms, the churches find themselves with models of organisation ill-suited to mission. New approaches are needed, and this book makes clear and well-argued proposals.

As is David’s helpful style, the contents list is broken down in detail, so specific discussions are easy to locate. The overall structure is of 3 parts – The Kingdom Community and diaconal church (with 3 Appendices), A renewed diaconate as an order of mission, and Methodism and the Methodist Diaconal Order – a movement for communal holiness (with 2 Appendices – Learning outcomes and Examples of mission agendas in practice). As suggested by ‘learning outcomes’, this is also a workbook, a practical guide not just to what a missional community might be, but how to build one.

Part I comprises 8 chapters. It opens with a survey of the forces acting on communities which tend to pull against traditional forms and the tensions this causes, within communities but also (without using the term) the anomie that affects individuals. There follows a theology of the Kingdom community, the meaning of 'community' and the dilemma this leads to, relating this to the Trinity as a community, gifting life, liberation, love and learning. This logically leads to a chapter on the theology of the Kingdom community, including a historical survey. There are clear parallels here with the Community of St Anselm, sponsored by Archbishop Justin, at Lambeth Palace. Next there is a chapter on the diaconal role of the church, again with a useful historical survey, followed by one discussing Mission, culture, stance and the laity. David makes the point strongly that we need to move from church-centred model to a king-community centred model, from exclusivity (join our club) to inclusivity, from indoctrination to education. This requires a new theology of what it means to be church, and what 'service' means, where the churches exist to educate all its members in how to serve God by serving others. Following a brief chapter on Diaconal collectives (I found thinking 'peer support group' helpful), there is an important chapter on Servant leadership and governance. A key point here is that the role of paid professionals in the churches is turned on its head, becoming one of equipping and supporting the laity rather than maintaining the internal functions of the institution. (I recall some years ago a prescient parish priest regularly reminding a congregation that he was a temporary paid assistant to them). The 3 chapter appendices set out the roles of the paid professionals, which chime well with the Kingdom @ Work. Final chapter in this part is "Mission as discernment and intervention", succinctly making the point that the purpose of mission is to intervene, as God's

servants, in the world around us, and to do so with careful discernment.

Part 2 comprises just two chapters, but important they are, discussing a renewed diaconate and the diaconate as an order of mission. A rediscovery of the diaconal role has characterised western Christianity over the past generation. We have seen the rediscovery of the permanent diaconate across several denominations, and within the Church of England we have seen the creation of Ordained Local Ministry and Authorised Lay Ministry. The Roman Catholic Church too has rediscovered the contribution a diaconate can make. One of the tensions this has thrown up is what diaconate is for – service within the church, to maintain what is already there – or outward-facing service to communities of place, affinity, need. While a more outward facing role has characterised the intention behind each of these development, in practice they often become imitations of the familiar, sucked from mission to maintenance. David argues cogently that the proper expression of diaconate is the former.

The final part, of three chapters, looks specifically at Methodism, nonetheless covering themes of equal relevance to any church organisation. David points out that as Methodism was established to witness to the gospel of communal holiness, its mission is diaconal; it needs to remember that is as much a movement as an institution. He then surveys the origin and history of the Methodist Diaconal Order and points to the role it is called to play in mission, moving finally to setting out how this can be made real. A key point he makes, which resonates with me as an MSE, is that the diaconate works within, alongside, and beyond the local church, indeed beyond the dispersed church, a prophetic role in each.

Practical, challenging, and inspiring in equal measure, this is also a well-constructed and accessible book which sits well with MSE. For all with a concern for mission in the contemporary world, this is a 'must read'. *Rob Fox*

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I write in response to a book review [by David Unsworth] in the last edition of MaW.

The book in question was written primarily as an 'evangelical' piece addressed to those who, today, simply cannot even identify 'priests' and 'vicars' nor understand what they do. Such was my finding when talking to a young man who came to fix our garage door. He couldn't put a name to anyone of this kind until I finally put my 'dog-collar' on. Then, he realised who I might be speaking of. Such people had not been part of his life.

The book was privately published and circulated in a small way – gifted to some – with a firm statement that this was in no way an academic treatise on priesthood. I am sad that the reviewer received a copy at all – it was certainly not for him. He is already in church. Many are not - nor would consider gracing our portals which is surely part of what MSE is about? A keen philosophical discussion took place with my hairdresser, after he had read the book, as he did my highlights!! Many have warmly received it and it is possible I shall write a second.

Apologies to all MSEs who might be wondering what their Moderator is up too. I promise I'm just spreading the word...in all senses I hope.

*Ruth*

## And Finally.....

Room 1.01

Dear ladies (and gentle men) please,  
When you pass through  
Into the place of lost and found  
And unappealing stuff,  
Place your special objects  
Carefully  
Into this pristine space  
Set aside for safety.

Remember to place freedom  
Of moving,  
Strange and wonderful encounters,  
The porous boundaries of friendship,  
And justice  
Safe inside,  
Beyond the putrid scents which rise  
From long dead hopes,  
The pull of power  
And the wounded practice (or principles)  
Of social equality.

**CHRISM** is on **Facebook**, 'Ministers at Work':

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/> and **LinkedIn**, at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3756477>





## **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 the Journal Editor.**

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