

Ministers-at-Work

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Editorial

July is with us already – and the life of busking (or not), or perhaps more appropriately juggling, that is our ministry continues. This edition contains a paper by Derek Avery, a newly ordained deacon working in mental health care and seeking to make some sense of some specific issues relating to how we engage with people with dementia, investigating this in the borderland he finds himself inhabiting between work and church. We also have an obituary for Peter Johnson, reflecting on his extensive contribution to education and his local community.

The majority of the content is taken up with papers either developed for, or reflecting on, the European Worker Priests' conference in Herzogenrath, Germany, at Pentecost. There is a lot of food for thought. An underlying theme for Margaret Trivasse was that of borderlands, given Herzogenrath's geographical location. Interactions at borders, or in the margins thread through all of the contributions. For Marianne Hayward, communication and interpretation in this place of interchange were fundamental. As a professional, she was heartened to find acceptance and encouragement from the very different priest-workers attending.

Many of the papers offer deeply personal insights into the authors' journeys. The Netherlands' paper notes that one might feel out of step – marginalised when attending family gatherings – yet also occupying a place on the edge amongst colleagues. This is probably an experience which many of us have had. However, a French contribution reflects that manual, repetitive work can make you grow as a human being and bear fruit for the Kingdom. Following George Herbert, the author likens cleaning to the offering of silent prayer. They argue that it is essential to be there. This experience

may be harder to replicate for those of us in professionally autonomous work or chained to a computer for much of the day.

The final important insight for me comes in the Italian contribution. The author asks 'What [is the] future for the earth? This is an important question for all of us, which is likely to reshape work once again in its wake. It is clear that as a world, we cannot continue to consume finite and precious resources, living in response to what the author describes as 'seductive, useless needs.' Instead, work in the future must help us to make a return to lives which are simpler.

Pauline Pearson

Working with individuals and families affected by a diagnosis of dementia – Derek Avery

I. Introduction

In this paper I will reflect on the challenges (and joys) of pastorally ministering to individuals and families who are experiencing a “rite of passage” that can be traumatic and disturbing. As well as the more familiar stages of life in which ministers and priests are frequently involved, (baptisms, weddings and funerals,) there are other occasions and transitions that people experience where the Church has had little or nothing to say either liturgically or pastorally. (These might include issues to do with retirement, divorce, redundancy etc.) I will focus particularly on one area that I am passionate about, for both personal and professional reasons. The area of transition (rite of passage) I will focus on is the pastoral and spiritual care of individuals and families affected by a diagnosis of dementia.

I will reflect on things that are currently being done well in our churches. I will also discuss areas for improvement. I will draw on personal experience (as the child of a parent who had dementia) as well as over ten years' professional experience working as a community worker with the elderly, many of whom have varying degrees of cognitive impairment and diagnoses of dementias. I will try to use my Christian experience of scripture and tradition to "thicken" my understanding of how we might minister to individuals and communities who are experiencing such an important transition

2. What is dementia?

What is commonly referred to as Dementia should really be referred to in the plural as it is not a single defined condition. What is commonly referred to as dementia is caused by a variety of diseases of the brain which can affect memory, the ability to carry out everyday tasks and communicate clearly. They can also affect an individual's perception of reality. It is important to know that these conditions are not a result of the normal ageing process. They go by various names: Alzheimer's disease, fronto-temporal dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies, vascular dementia and many others.

There are currently more than 800,000 people living with (not suffering from) dementia in the UK and this figure is predicted to rise as the population increases due to longevity.

In a recent survey 82% of the public believe people with dementia and their carers need more help and support. The RC Diocese of Liverpool publishes a guide to helping people with forms of dementia.

"Churches and faith-based organisations have an important role to play in ensuring people living with dementia can continue to live their lives and be an active part of their communities for as long as possible. Many of our parishioners will develop dementia or be caring for someone who does. By

being more dementia friendly, we can help and support them to continue practicing their faith.”

It is a pastoral reality that most congregations will have members who are experiencing one form of dementia or another. We also need to realise that individuals closely connected with these individuals will wish to continue to be part of the worshipping community and will also have needs which will need to be met spiritually and pastorally.

3. So what is the role of the Minister or priest in making sure that people living with dementia are cared for appropriately?

The role of Pastoral care for people living with dementia cannot be delegated completely to the Priest or Minister working within a church. It is the responsibility of the whole congregation to become a welcoming presence that cares for and nurtures all its members.

The Priest/Minister, however, is perhaps uniquely able to re-present the idea of God’s unfailing promise to remember His people - that he will always be with them. This can manifest itself in those moments of attentive listening displayed in a pastoral conversation or visit. It can be in the way that worship is conducted to be inclusive and non-threatening to the person living with a dementia. It can also be in the way that a priest or minister trains her / his congregation to be a body with many parts. God will never forget them even if memories fail. Every individual is precious in God’s eyes and he has created each of us in his own image:

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

One of the things that people associate with Dementia is a failing memory. From experience more recent memories are the ones to

go first, whereas older deep-seated memories (from childhood for example) are deeply embedded. A person even with quite an advanced dementia can recall poetry, songs, prayers and hymns from decades long past, whereas the details of a recent conversation can slip the mind easily.

From personal experience this can be evidenced in care homes across the country when elderly residents take part in worship services or entertainment sessions, particularly where familiar tunes and words are recalled with pinpoint accuracy.

This can have implications from both a pastoral and liturgical perspective. Pastors need to exhibit caring and attentive listening above all, when dealing with someone affected by memory loss.

When conducting a conversation with a person living with a dementia it is important to stay “in the moment”. Or to use another fashionable phrase “to be mindful.” I learned this early on in my career working with the elderly. Questions that might seem perfectly innocent in everyday conversation such as “Have you had your lunch?” can be distressing for someone who cannot remember the immediate past. “Are you hungry?” usually elicits a truthful response without causing any distress.



It is also important to remember that individuals may have become confused about where they are and at what stage of life they are at. This often manifests itself as a (for want of a better word) “retreating into the past.” Sometimes the person thinks they are younger and have to make their children’s tea, or to be at work at a particular time. The effective pastor or care giver need not feel guilty about “colluding” with what could be described as a fantasy, or something that is not real. Correcting someone can be more distressing (for both parties) than going with the flow and allow that moment to pass as it inevitably will.

Another thing that the pastoral care giver can find useful is the knowledge that Emotional memories are more deep-seated than Cerebral memories. The Alzheimer’s Society run informative sessions on Dementia Awareness. On one such session I learned that a person may not remember that they “have been to the coast and had an ice-cream”, but they will probably remember that they have had a good time. Just as an individual may not remember being told that they had forgotten someone’s name but could well remember that they had caused someone to get upset. The emotional is more enduring than the intellectual. God feels our distress and the yearnings of our heart more than any cerebral gymnastics we may have been capable of in an earlier life.

The minister’s very presence as a caring and listening, compassionate presence is a reminder of God’s presence with us all. Simply by “being with” an individual, praying with and for them is a reminder that God has not abandoned them. He is a faithful God who always keeps his promises.

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hand.

The person may not be aware of what is going on intellectually, but they will feel the presence of a person and a God who regards them as supremely important.

John Swinton in his amazing book *Dementia: Living in the memories of God* writes movingly about this. He says that the normal medical explanations of dementia are flawed when we seek to gain a complete knowledge of how an individual experiences dementia. Swinton argues that when our memories disappear, we are still the person that we were before. We are much more than a collection of experiences and memories. Our identity as a human being is more to do with us being remembered by God, than what we can remember ourselves.

Another role of the Minister / Priest might be to provide opportunities for prayer and worship for individuals affected by a dementia and the people who are close to them. As already mentioned there can be moments of lucidity when long stored deep memories are accessed through music, familiar words or sensual stimulation. In her book “Worshipping with Dementia”, Louise Morse quotes the person in charge of a care company witnessing worship in residential care.

I told him there are times in our care homes, when, like lightning through darkness there are fleeting moments of grace; glimpses when the person with dementia breaks through and is seen again.

Unlike some of the other ‘rites of passage’ such as baptisms, marriage, or funerals, which often have a central ‘liminal’ experience, the pastoral care of someone with a diagnosis or symptoms of dementia cannot be seen as a one-off ceremony, but as a gentle accompaniment through a series of ‘gates’ as the condition progresses. It cannot be marked with a single ceremony which will have all the stages of the Grief Cycle. The minister needs to realise that there may be Shock, Denial, Anger and depression as we

progress through any of these gates. We as ministers and priests may have to accompany individuals and families multiple times through any of these gates. Due to the nature of these conditions it can be an iterative process, with regression as well as advance as the experience of a dementia makes itself felt.

4. How can the Priest / Minister help the family and friends of someone affected by a diagnosis of dementia?

From personal experience one of the most distressing aspects of a diagnosis for the families of someone with a diagnosis of dementia is a feeling that they have 'lost, the person', before they have actually died.

I have seen families openly confess to the fact that they feel that their family member is "no longer there". It is also extremely distressing to feel that a loved partner, parent or sibling no longer knows who their loved one is or confuses them with another family member.

Again, from experience It can also be distressing for a family member if an individual has forgotten that someone else has died. I have witnessed situations where a child has reminded a parent that their other parent has died, only to be met with an outpouring of grief for the loss of someone they had already grieved for years earlier.

The Priest and Minister can prove a valuable asset to a person's family in helping them to negotiate their own feelings about the diagnosis of a dementia, reassuring them that their feelings of distress, irritation and sadness are quite natural reactions to loss. A priest might be able to explain that the person with dementia is still loved and remembered by God as they are by their family. I often draw family members' attention to the fact that there are probably things from their own early childhood that they cannot remember, moments when their parent showed them unconditional love. Their

lack of memory does not mean that it never happened. Perhaps now is their opportunity to show unconditional generous loving in return.

I feel another role that the pastoral care giver can give is to help the individual to stay “in the moment” with the diagnosed person. I recently spoke to a Senior Chaplain at a local mental health trust who noticed that a daughter was often distressed after visiting her mother with Alzheimer’s disease.

“I keep telling her that the Beatles split up in the 1970’s and two of them are dead, but she insists she is going to see them in concert next week!” The chaplain very gently said to the daughter:

“Next time.. why not say that you will go with her to the concert?” Indeed, this is what happened. The following week, the meeting between mother and daughter went beautifully and joyfully. The daughter had taken some CDs to her mother’s room and reported to the Chaplain that they were able to sing and dance together and talk about which was their favourite Beatle.

A simple but poignant story about ‘staying in the moment’ to help both women to realise it was Love that connected them, not a collection of correct /incorrect memories. The chaplain with simple and generous listening and gentle reorientation was able to give that joy back to the two women that was at risk of falling apart. That minister had restored them to a much better place.

5. Conclusion

A diagnosis of a dementia is obviously a distressing time for all concerned. It can be marked by intense feelings of grief, loss, anger and bewilderment (and that can be on all sides of the family and community dynamic). It can be likened to a line in the psalms:

“How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

The strange land of Dementia is making itself increasingly felt and as we live longer its prevalence can only become more marked. There cannot be many churches that have not had at least some of their members who have experienced the impact of such a diagnosis. The role of the pastor, priest and minister in helping all concerned through this rite of passage cannot be underestimated. The minister is able to remind the people concerned that the most important relationship we can have is in the loving embrace of a God who knows us intimately. It is likely to be a range of interventions involving generous and open listening, compassionate understanding, gentle direction and reorientation. Most of all it is in reminding us all that we find our identity in a God in whose image we are made. God will never forget his people he has carved us on the palm of His hand.

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Derek Avery was recently ordained deacon and is an SSM working in a mental health care organisation.

Raising funds for CHRISM

In addition to the existing source of donations to CHRISM by shopping online with a wide range of retailers via Easyfundraising

(<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk>) we can now earn a 0.5% donation each time we shop with Amazon.

We've registered with Amazon's 'Smile' charity donation facility in the name of the charity that sits behind CHRISM. When shopping on Amazon simply go through this link and search for Christians in Secular Employment Trust: <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/294910-0>

So far this year we've raised over £50 from Easyfundraising alone.

Happy shopping! *Rob Fox, Treasurer*

Herzogenrath Worker Priest conference



Contribution from the Belgian Worker-Priests

How am I (are we) changed by our experience in a world of work which is impacted by particular economic decisions?

1. In 1965, with some anxiety and trepidation, we went to work in a factory. Thus we joined a working world which was completely foreign to us, our origins being in the lower middle class. Our contacts with worker-priests and the Second Vatican Council helped us make the choice to become worker priests.

In becoming part of their community we found that we needed them (i.e. rather than that they needed us.)

2. Our intention was to share the life of the worker and to demonstrate our solidarity with an exploited section of the populace. Inspired by 'Redemptive Incarnation' and 'living with', we wanted to make the Church a presence in the world of workers. But because of their own solidarity they were already partly living in the spirit of the Gospel. Our 'being a priest' wasn't a problem for them just as soon as we could do our work honestly and in a spirit of mutual responsibility.
3. By sharing their working lives, often as members of a socialist Trade Union, we became integrated with them. In Catholic circles people often said: 'What? Working with those terrible people?' Now our attitude became: 'As soon as good work is being done, colour is unimportant.' ('Colour' here in the sense of political colour, not race.) We began to understand that the Union was a very useful and important blessing.
4. Believing this, we began to get to grips with the essence of the Gospel as: working together to achieve a more humane world, just as Jesus had done in his time. Social engagement and gospel life go together.
5. We came to a positive realisation that we had to learn how to do our jobs from our fellow-workers. They were happy to help us do the work better and faster.
6. From our experiences of injustice we experienced much friendship among the workers, which was expressed in concrete, pithy terms. (During the years of seminary formation we had used a quite different language.) Contact with immigrants was also a source of human richness.
7. Work on the assembly line was another source of solidarity, thanks to teamwork and the feeling of being appreciated. But assembly-line work was also a source of mental disorientation, which persisted after work had finished.



8. Social engagement: to protest, in a firm that was not unionised, that there was not enough time to rest or to eat, resulted in immediate sacking. In a firm with a works council, campaigning for fair pay for apprentices, for more hygienic catering arrangements and for compulsory compensation when there were widespread redundancies didn't go down well either; when the company was restructured I was sacked. There were discussions with the worker-priests: just to let this fester or to take action!
9. Working life has changed our outlook on the world and has transformed us as humans. We looked at the world from below, from the perspective of people who 'haven't anything to say', - 'you mustn't think about it'. We felt ourselves to be mere ciphers in a society organised primarily to favour those who were served, where those who provided the services were in second place; which was organised for the benefit of the rich and influential. Our experience was that we were neither respected nor valued; we felt that we didn't really exist.
10. Some of us were drawn into activities which supported ex-prisoners, the homeless, asylum-seekers and itinerants, and this fundamentally changed our outlook on society.

11. As a clinic nurse working in geriatrics I was forbidden to give anything beyond purely medical treatment: pills, injections, dressings. Any more humanitarian case was prohibited.
12. In the towns there is a substantial distinction between the richer neighbourhoods and those which are more proletarian. It can be clearly seen where there are building sites and in street cleaning. In the working-class areas the rubbish and dirt left behind hangs about for years.

To what extent has the world of work changed, and in what ways do you see it evolving in the future?

1. More than ever, the workers are at the service of the people with power. The human being is forced to submit to a monetary valuation.
2. Work has become less physically demanding thanks to mechanisation; more attention is paid to safety. But workers have to be more flexible, not just in working methods but in their places of work.
3. New technologies – computers, robots etc. – require a highly-trained workforce, which has resulted in the redundancy of no small number of workers and staff. As a consequence: post office counter staff and bank clerks disappear and are replaced by postal services and electronic banking.
4. Profits get bigger and bigger, and each year must be an increase on the year before. The entrepreneur's principal objective is profit. Social security is increasingly under threat. Those who make vast profits – the big players – pay proportionately little tax. The state then has to economise, which is done to the detriment of welfare provision: social security, pensions, unemployment benefit. Corporate chief executives pull down exorbitant pay packages.
5. The environment also suffers. The profits from construction and oil companies and huge agricultural enterprises take priority over well-being, nature, the forest.

6. Work is always speeding up, at the workers' expense. Postmen have to run to complete their deliveries, as do street cleaners and refuse collectors. Hurry, hurry! More overtime, fewer fixed-hours contracts, many more internships. More and more people suffering stress and burn-out.
7. We are moving towards a working world of the highly qualified, which benefits fewer people in an increasingly-mechanised society. What will the 'world of work' come to mean? Labourers who used to work responsibly together are replaced by huge machines, monsters, controlled by an overworked operative. Fewer and fewer unskilled workers.
8. Despite the large number of unemployed people, one has to work for longer before getting a pension.
9. None-the-less, workers will always find the motivation and means to oppose injustice, low pay and environmental devastation. Liberal neo-capitalism has become as ill-omened and totalitarian as all the other ideologies. A freedom which does not contribute towards equality and fraternity is surely an abuse of power.

Contribution from the English Group

In what ways am I (are we) changed by our experience in a world of work affected by particular economic changes

One contributor said: I work in the NHS on a permanent contract. I provide psychotherapy. I find that austerity affects many of my clients who suffer problems of mental health. There are problems with poverty, a lack of suitable work, controls over the provision of unemployment payments, and they have to make all their applications using computers. This is very difficult for those who do not have access to the internet or who cannot read or write fluently. The new social security “Universal Credit”, creates many



problems because there is always a delay between the request and the payment.

Some examples (I have changed the names):

- Things are going better for Philip these days. However, because he has been ill for several years, he does not have a good CV and it is almost impossible for him to find work.
- Ibrahim is a refugee who is skilled at woodwork, but because he has still not learnt fluent English he cannot obtain authorisation to work here in the UK.
- Jean suffers depression. She cannot cope with her finances. So she is behind with her rent. She is in debt and is in danger of being thrown out of her accommodation.
- Nicole suffers panic attacks. The Assessors of her ability to work say that she must find a job because, physically, she is sound, but she is fearful of leaving her building. They do not take into account her mental state.

And me? How am I changed by these encounters? We are a very small group and the therapists have to do many things for their clients for which they are not qualified – for example, to complete applications for their benefits. I am humbled because I have so much and they have so little. Nevertheless they have so much courage. I am angry at this government which seems to be ignorant, or neglects, the state of those who live in poverty. In the Kingdom of God, the poor will be first, and we who are wealthy must wait until last.

Another contributor said : After my studies as a Chemical Engineer, I started work in a large international chemical company. I was working in a large department with many other young engineers (with different work in the many factories of the firm) – but we

were together, a large “village” with professional and social networks to encourage and support each other. For three years I was working on one of these factories, in the north of England – and I discovered another “village” of these who worked and lived there.

Ten years later all the young engineers had left for the different factories. [The central department no longer existed]. I was given a position in a division that made carbon fibres – a business unit of some 200 people, again a small “village”. And during those years I was ordained priest – known and supported by my bosses and my colleagues – the priest of the village?

Ten years later as a result of the changes of industries and the power of large international companies, I was made redundant and I began work in a consultancy business. Although I had a “base community” in an office in Birmingham, I was always travelling in order to visit different clients in many different industries and countries. I would stay with them one or perhaps two weeks. This form of work has continued – but now I work self-employed, without a communal office, with no permanent colleagues.

And for me? I have lived through real changes in the industrial and economic structures – changes which have impacted many people, who must work now without a job and a permanent contract. I have spoken of “villages”. For me the most important question is where can people now find these “villages” ? – the places, the groups where they are valued, supported and exist in relationship with others. And, personally, how can I understand what it means to be a priest in this new space ? I am happy to “be with” many other people in this new way of working, and I try to remain outside

the parish church, outside the “village” to discover an itinerant existence.

And for us together ? (from another contributor)

It seems to us that many factors are affecting the economic world at present. Some of these are welcome as, for example, the world acknowledges the dangers of climate change and the effects of our use of plastics on our oceans and wildlife. [This is in addition to political changes including Brexit and American policy.] Already we have seen big announcements in the motor industry against diesel cars - new models are being cancelled and factories are closing. We have also seen huge reductions in the use of plastic carrier bags, and other plastic items.

These changes are welcome for the sake of the future of our planet, but will have a huge effect on industries that make these goods, and the workers within those industries. Companies must change (or die), and towns that are reliant on such companies will struggle to survive. For example - in Swindon, Honda have announced the closure of their car factory. This affects around 5000 staff directly, but there are probably an additional 10,000 people and their families in smaller companies who depend on them

There have been many changes in the history of industrial life, with the arrival of new technologies, and the people involved are affected heavily and may lose hope. What can we do to offer hope?

And for the Church ? The Anglican church in England has recognised that there are people who have a vocation to be priest in their work, But currently the church want to ask the business (or the management of the business) to give validation to this calling, in a specific place, a specific office. But this is a model of the world of

work which no longer exists (perhaps for 30 years) - a model of large businesses, large offices and fixed places of work.

It seems to us that there are many officials in the Church who have no understanding of the realities of the world of work of today. They do not understand the changes which we have experienced, towards more insecure work, with different customers and different businesses. It remains to us to explain these new ways of working to the churches.

Ecclesiastes 3.9-13, 22



Contribution from the German-speaking Group

In what ways am I (are we) changed by our experience in a world of work affected by particular economic changes

The question of work and how we are changed in the course of our lives is at the core of the communality of our groups at Ilbenstadt:

It is a way of living removed from our original academic and theological training. We often speak of change of place, sometimes of change of class. Above all in Germany it is a real change for the theologians, who are normally semi-officials of the state, as catholic

or protestant ministers fulltime in the church (after the agreement of 1934 !).

Christian listens to the invitation of the Incarnation already in the burning bush (Ex 3), but which is not consumed. The “change of place” is the recognition of a “holy place”, “the flight from Egypt” into a new country.

« Last week I was made redundant, along with all my colleagues in my group, after ten years of working as an inventory checker in supermarkets. They have made an offer to be taken over by another inventory business. But it is a definite break and a cause of significant insecurity. For me at the same time it gives an impetus to look back on how I have been affected by the experiences of this work. It is above all about the relations with my colleagues, some of whom I have worked with for many years...” wrote x.

Because of our lack of practical training we do not have a choice in our search for work and we did not want to either. Some, such as Y, have had some practical training during the course of their working life. So work has become all the more a homeland.

The places of work were for us also an act of solidarity – “often without words” as X wrote. And grounded in our biblical understanding of the life of Jesus and his calling from God, who liberates the poor.

Today, for those who are still in paid work, this often means work in the service sector in any sort of care work. We share the fate of millions of men and women in Germany: people who often only just reach the minimum wage of € 9.19 per hour. People who often only speak a few words of German, or none at all.

Also all important to us is the work as a place of life. In the majority of the towns in the region of the Ruhr there is a clear North/South divide: the poor and the migrants in the north; the rich in the south.

So we live in the north where less than 20% vote in elections and if they do, naturally vote for the Right (the AfD). Christian describes the community at the flat in the Naunynstrasse in Berlin as a place where he hears the word of the limitless invitation of Jesus and the missionary call “come and see...” (Jn 1,39).

This life is not just an experience for ourselves but is an existential and spiritual-theological measure of our faith. And there are consequences for understanding in the long run. Z speaks of the contemplative dimension of the monotony of work and of the “calling” to communality with the colleagues in the work. “I believe” he writes “that only if the inner spiritual joy becomes a presence in the work of the business, it gives a perspective for me and for the others. X calls this “to become acquainted with the colleagues. In the service sector one meets men and women with absolutely different ideas about life, and with disturbances in their own lives”. In our reflections are the key words: the world, justice, church and faith.

We are children of the middle class and we aspire to a stable life. But one characteristic of a change of place is uncertainty. I myself noted after 18 years of working in a textile firm, and becoming by the end a delegate of the Union: the complete bankruptcy of the business. Others among us have had the same or similar experiences. And this goes with a financial uncertainty which begins little by little to form the whole of life; in the same way as for the work colleagues. E wrote provocatively from a distance of many years that where he lives now, he is no longer in the struggles in the factory of a “latent disgust of the bourgeoisie”.

Another important experience of this change of place is vulnerability. Without wounds the way does not go on. For me personally a real/lasting symbol is the loss of my right index finger at the beginning of my work. Throughout life we feel the consequences of work: tiredness, bad backs, aching bones..... But, as

Z also underlines, among those who work in the Church the internal wounds are at the same level.

“I must use much effort in my work; I see my younger colleagues who are much quicker and stronger than I, and in the evening I am simply exhausted. If my health permits and if they want to keep me employed and the firm continues to exist, I would like to stay until I reach pension age. In my interior I think of the word Hypomone of the hymn in Philippians (Phil2,8): stay down, continue; the biblical translation is “obedient” (Jesus), that is to say continue with the decision to stay many years until the pension...” wrote S. [not in German version]

We are not isolated in our workplaces, but in community with our colleagues. Today, is the word solidarity still valid? Contact with colleagues is important and fundamental, sometimes friendship. Despite the collapse of the business we were together with many people from the firm for the funeral of a young colleague. “All this has worked over the years so that personally I am less marked by an ideal, but by the concrete life with heavy and beautiful pages” said X.



Our work, the relationships in work and the contradictions between Capital and the work have always accompanied our reflections. Globalisation has not diminished this contradiction, but it has

increased at the global level: to try to resist against capitalism in work but also in all the other personal political activities.

Some of us have been elected as individual Union delegates [on works councils], despite the fact that this signifies in the final analysis a cooperation with Capital - under the German law on works' constitutions (after WWII). We decided to do this because of personal contacts and solidarity with our colleagues, and also through contact with people from the local unions which supported us.

Global capitalism hardens the conditions of work. The much disputed question of migration has created a "reserve army" from the point of view of capital. Sometimes here in the countries of the west, sometimes in the countries of the south: colleagues from south east Europe, refugees with limited work permits, part-time and contract labour, which create a second circle of exploitation. Against all these factors of removing solidarity between colleagues, this "poison" as X says, competition between people in work. It is necessary "that we resist" – it is necessary and of great importance to us.

Through our experience of work and life in our districts there is no reconciliation between our side and the economic society and of profit without limits. Similarly, if it not currently a time for great visions of a new society of justice and equality, we try and we want to live in opposition to this economisation, where the individual counts for nothing.

In the years of living in the tradition of the Worker Priests we have lost the Church. Not necessarily because of ourselves, because we sense a growing distance between us and the Church. But the resolution of the catholic and protestant church in Germany as a "religious power structure" is growing with great speed. In addition in the crisis of sexual violence, which seems to be a structural

element of the “pastoral power”. It is possible that the Roman Catholic Church in western lands will not be able to recover from this crisis of credibility. “The Church will be driven into the wall” wrote Christian. But we are not its saviours.

We are all called to protect or regain a more mystical way in to faith, as independent of the institution of the church as possible. This can also recreate and strengthen our personal interreligious way. “For me it is also clearer that my prayer life has changed. For years I expressly made a long daily prayer time. That is less important for me today, but without losing my intense relationship with God. I cannot explain it very well. Everything is interconnected: prayer, work, tiredness, joy, relationships, solitude – everything is present. And it is far simpler than such big words suggest” wrote X

A French contribution

How I was changed by my experience: ‘in the world of work driven by economic circumstances’.

I left salaried employment in January 2017 after 22 years working as a salaried supervisor and trainer. I set up an independent office to work as an educator. Why this occupation/profession? I had worked for 6 years in a family business which specialised in Forestry which had a saw-mill and a machine shop to make wood products – laminates To do this job I had passed a diploma in business management.

Having been sent to the (French) national school for the children of wood industry workers which brought together the children of workers in the (French) Timber industry, I did not see myself as an unskilled worker in an industry whose boss had been my school friend. I was assigned to participate in and then run training sessions

with the MRJC (Christian Organisation for rural youth). I liked working as an educator.

One day I met some ladies who taught children who had been referred by Social Services. I learned about a profession, which was little thought of, and which seemed to be at the bottom of the ladder of education specialities. It was this occupation that I realised that I wished to follow, as soon as I had done research into the likely salary involved, so that I could work closely with young people in difficulties.

I worked as a stand in at first until I had passed the exam to become a supervisor/teacher before I could be recognised as a professional by my colleagues. I found great solidarity of thought with these teachers and at the same time I was working in an organisation which was changing direction and evolving. Before the year 2000 those responsible for the make-up of these structures were, in the most part specialist educators who had a profession, as one says, and who had climbed through the hierarchy by their pure ability.

I started to work when, little by little, those in charge were professional administrators, good organisers but often quite distant from the front line of education. Those who managed day to day events were quite disengaged, as the director took most of the decisions, for example about budgetary economies which entailed the reduction of educational efforts and these budgets reduced year by year. Eventually it was left to the weekends and holidays to fill leisure time without any educational goals (television, ice skating, cinema, paint-ball etc).

My last project was to work in an ESAT (Institution to support and to aid by work); which gathered up adults who were intellectually or psychologically handicapped or simply troubled and in need of support to work I was taken on to direct a joinery workshop which had a section making firewood. It was very physical work which was

very close to traditional (artisanal) craft, because I was able to find an outlet for the work, conceive and draw -up the pieces to make, then make proposals with estimates (of cost), for submission to a site manager, who often knew nothing of wood, only had a management role. In this as well I was put in situations which I was never able to control the relationship with clients, alone. The team that I put together was very disparate (in ability) and I had to match each piece to the workers to match their ability, which is the role of a workshop manager. It was fascination work but little appreciated by senior management who did not hesitate to close the workshop after five years, as my boss said it did not produce an adequate paper-chase. I had to explain that each piece of work was adapted to the workers ability so that they could each find a job that was achievable for them. In addition we had outside workshops which enabled contact with the general public outside the institution. Taking this direction led to my departure in retirement and to stop work completely. My colleagues (laundries, gardening, forge, packaging) and myself could not argue with this. This was two years ago. I meet my colleagues from time to time who told me less and less (as time has passed). ESET has directed its workshops, more and more towards work in packaging, that is to say putting in boxes



items destined for dispatch to industry, nothing much to interest handicapped workers.

Finally I learned to obey the orders of my boss and the director and to swallow all their inconsistencies. I was simply an employee, in another place and under another management I would have contested their decisions. Referred to personnel I was able to defend the workers in my team and (explain) the advantages of my workshop for people with a handicap. This held no weight with management as the decisions had already been made.

Forced to follow the lead of the institution I had had to obey the decisions that were not of my making nor was I involved in discussing them. I supported my team members constituting a precarious solidarity against management attacks, the ploy of our workshop superintendent was to divide us in order to keep a tight grip on their decisions and his employees. I lived through what many have done and survived: dependant on my inner authority and an ability to navigate the incoherence (of management). To live like that is to put one's self at the level of the lowest in the establishment always attending to the needs of the handicapped clients. It was this dependency that led me to re-join the union: I was able to work out that we were quite simply defending our elementary rights i.e.. to exercise the responsibility entrusted to me was often short circuited by the boss; the right to training and to defence when one amongst us was threatened with dismissal because they questioned too much.

The reasons that led me to rejoin these powerless people were multiple, perhaps linked to my history which made me aware of the conditions of the working class, initially in the family business. The Beatitudes as recounted by St Luke say : (Luke 6, 20 -23 roughly) Happy are the poor, very happy those who are hungry and thirsty, the disinherited, those who have apparently been spurned by others ; the miserable, all these are the dearest to the heart of God. I was attracted to another life in work and in housing. 'We others,

peoples of the streets, believe with all our energy, that this street where this world of God has placed us, is for us the place of our saintliness” (Madeleine Delbrel).

It was all these experiences which persuaded me to join the worker-priests group which were able to accept me immediately and to delegate me to the workers’ mission in my diocese. And, if the bishop asked me, to be prison chaplain, which had a certain resonance for me. The great difference is that I don’t live with them.

A further French contribution

I am sending you a little personal contribution because over the last few months I have not had the opportunity of meeting other worker priests. How am I (possibly!) changed by my experience “in a world of work affected by particular economic changes”? The question is a broad one, a bit vague for me: it smacks of a compromise, word by word, by the preparation team.

It is clear that in general, in France as well as Germany and almost everywhere else, we are present at a growth in treating casually those people in an insecure situation. Everyone knows that, and it is a commonplace to say it. As for me, I looked for work in the cleaning business in 1993 because I knew that I could find it there without any specific professional training, and because I wanted in a small way to enter into the life of people who had exactly no chance of doing anything else, if only because of their foreign background. One feels a certain acceleration of this insecurity, above all since the reforms of workers’ rights over the last ten years in France, but already being quite low down I have not fallen from on high! Since 1993, I have almost always worked as a cleaner. The insecurity sometimes lies in a fixed term contract which does not result in an open-ended contract. It’s also when certain elements of collective agreement are not applied and nothing happens because colleagues do not know, or do not say anything. Insecurity above all takes the

form of those situations in which one is not respected by the “little bosses” (not the big ones!) and by the people we meet in the workplace. Some are pleasant: others ignore you because you are only a menial. People throw away no matter what, and we must pick it up! The wonderful Charles de Foucauld went to collect the poems of his Tuaregs; as for me, I “collect” their waste; we do what we can!



More often, it's also the insecurity of having nothing to say due to having to go more quickly to finish the job in the little time we are given. When there is a call for tender for a cleaning job, it is often the Society which offers the lowest price which is awarded the contract. And because they want to preserve their margins, we are the ones who suffer the consequences: the hourly salary could not be lower, they reduce the time given for the same job! I have worked in a dozen cleaning businesses. In only one of these Societies was it possible for me to get the attention of the trade union on behalf of my colleagues. It is derisory, certainly insecure, to try to help colleagues and limit the damage. We are not significant in the face of Management!

After all these years, I am changed by this experience of the world of work. Without doubt, others would be even better at realizing

this than me! What changes me little by little, day by day is the fact of going to slave away each morning “like everyone else”. It’s the school of reality and of faithfulness to life “just as it is”. Sometimes, I am dead on my feet but I say to the Lord: “I know that you love me and I am there for you”. Manual, repetitive work, that’s all about austerity. But I know that all this makes me grow as a human being and bear fruit for the Kingdom. It is like the offering of silent prayer. It is essential to be there. To hold on in trust. That is all. God who is good takes care of the rest.

Herzogenrath 2019: An Italian contribution

How am I changed by our experience in a world of work affected by particular economic changes?

I started work in 1972 as a very young priest. It was a considered a choice over years of study in the seminary. I have not lived in a parish. My being as a priest was tied to work. In Italy, priests have privileges and I myself have always stressed the ministry as freely given. After an initial experience in a factory in Milan, which was ended through the intervention of the Cardinal, I started alongside two craftsmen where I learned the job, or perhaps the art, of a carpenter. As part of the work, I had the opportunity of going into houses for furniture and that gave me the chance to speak, and listen, to people.

These were the years when the outskirts of Rome were invaded by people from the South in search of work and the villages of the suburb were left to themselves, without all the services necessary for living: water, gas, electricity, schools, pharmacies, sewerage. During these years I lived in a sacristy (3mx2), in the humidity. I still feel the consequences of that life. In listening to people, I had the opportunity to understand their real needs. And that is why I have

participated in all the fights for social services, as well as jobs, which were sometimes dangerous.

The way that I survived was “to live the Beatitudes of the Gospel”.

“Happy are the poor, to them belongs the Kingdom of heaven”

The experience of working with others led me to understand that the poor are those who give the possibility of building a truly human world, not the rich who create it in their own image and likeness. Living as an illegal in a slum, I realized the importance of a town which is habitable. Welcoming the marginalized and living with them, I recognized the problems of marginalization, of immigration, of refugees. The Kingdom of heaven is nothing less than an alternative life, meaningful and truly human. When I began my ministry, my mission was “to evangelize the poor” but in fact it was they who evangelized me.

“Blessed are those who weep, for they will be comforted”



To weep is to hear the cry of those who suffer injustice and at the same time become spokesperson for those who cry. I have welcomed refugees from Somalia, Kosovo, Albania, Algeria. I have

heard their cries and their sufferings, and that has driven me to seek out humane solutions, housing, welcome, work and dignity. To console is nothing less than sharing and staying close.

“Happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth”

Gentleness is non-violence. As a carpenter, I tried to use wood from our forests, where the trees are replanted, not like the forests of the Amazon, Africa and other countries in South-East Asia. In respecting nature, we have the earth as our heritage, if we destroy nature our planet will not survive. I have refused to work with wood coming from these areas. The meek is also the one who does not try to obtain things by violence. The struggles for a habitable district have been made by this method, which has borne much fruit. And over the years I worked in the non-violent education centre which I founded.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy”

Work has mellowed me and today I see many young people with insecure jobs, who do not have security, they are at the mercy of the market. “When I do not need you, go away”, such is the philosophy of those who give work. I am sorry for them, but that is not enough and I ask myself, “what can I do? My task is to help them as much as possible to discover their own talents, to choose a way of life and a job relating to their skills, above all in craftwork and agriculture.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”

It is about knowing how to interpret reality, not just with the head, but also with the heart. To be capable of seeing the suffering and the positivity of those whom we meet, such that we succeed only in seeing God in human form, as Jesus said, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to

drink”. Purity of heart is possible when we share, when we live side by side and work together.

“Blessed are the peacemakers because they will be called children of God”

To make peace, to create peace, to be peace. It is to live in such a way that the environment in which we are is truly human where people work and live in peace. And that is possible if there is justice and rights are respected. The place of the worker priest is where there are many problems and it is with people with whom we share the life, working for a solution to protect their life and their dignity.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice, because the Kingdom of heaven is theirs”

An authentic personal quality of life belongs to the one who fights for and engages in change, and that will bring conflict from opposing forces, but good will always succeed in winning, as well as exhaustion and many setbacks. My area is struggling to become more liveable, after years of meetings, suggestions are realized, but all through a non-violent fight. If it had been violent, we would have got the opposite result.

How much has the world of work changed and in what way do we see its development in the future?

The job of the carpenter has completely changed. It's a “human” activity, where manual creativity dictates the day. Today the jobs of the manual worker and the agricultural worker are starting to disappear. Exploitation of the earth and its resources have come to an end. What future for the earth? It is a fundamental question, and the question leads to responses for a better future. Work is tied to this question. We cannot continue to consume resources which are

about numerous seductive, useless needs. Return to simplicity of life and consumption.

Independent working is being developed with the requirements of businesses to agree to give to workers autonomous and independent status, while continuing to work for them in such a way that the responsibility is put on them. It is a means of escaping taxes and enriching themselves and for the great entrepreneurs to hide their riches of their income in tax havens. In this way, disposable income becomes ever smaller because they must pay to the state that which previously was the responsibility of the employer.

The future is work which respects the earth, its resources and people's dignity. The new forms of slavery are insecure jobs where the worker is at the disposal of the employer 24 hours a day, without respect for their free time and family life. The old slogan, "work less, work for everyone". Not the great multinational industries, which manipulate and influence governments, but small businesses located in different areas which produce that which serves the residents.

The Netherlands viewpoint

How am I (or are we) changed by our experience in a world of work affected by particular economic changes?

Because there isn't a group in the Netherlands, I can only speak here of my own story. Since 2002, I have been working as a home help in domiciliary care. Over these years the world and in particular the organization and the working conditions have changed. In this account, I describe these changes and I want to demonstrate that not only in my sector but also in other sectors, such as the postal

service, changes have taken place. And finally I want to explain in a few words how the work has changed me personally.

Domiciliary care

In 2002 I started work with TSU (domiciliary care for the town of Utrecht): an organization in the town with around 1500 employees. The TSU provided home help (the work which I do) family caregivers, nursing care and all sorts of accompanying. We worked in small teams of 10-15 workers. Every two weeks, we had a meeting to evaluate the work completed, and this was during a paid hour. Regularly we had training during our working hours. The time for moving between clients was paid as well as telephone expenses.



In 2006 came a merger TSU with several care homes and nursing homes in the town. The new organization was called AVEANT. 3000 employees worked there. For us as home helps, there were still small teams. But now we no longer had a paid review of the work, only every four weeks; we still had a regular paid training session. The time between jobs and telephone expenses were paid.

In 2012 AVEANT was taken over by CAREYN: a care organization of around 15000 employees, which included care home and nursing

homes and domiciliary care for the provinces of Utrecht, Zuid-Holland, Brabant and Zeeland (almost a third of the Netherlands).

As family caregivers we were answerable to a separate organization: CAREYN HZ, with its own manager and its own advisory body. We were about 4000 employees. We no longer worked in small teams; team meetings took place three times a year, without pay, and the review was made in the big group. A training session was suggested regularly, but without pay. The time between clients was no longer paid, and we had to use our own telephone. For the period between 2012 and 2014, the salary of almost all the helpers was reduced: for some by 10%, to others from 20 to 25%.

In 2014 CAREYN HZ was liquidated and we were taken over by TZORG, which only provides home help. It is a young organization which started in 2009. It is active in 80% of the boroughs in the whole country. Thanks to this new uptake (4000 employees) and some other acquisitions, TZORG then amounted to 10,000 employees. But under TZORG the team meeting (not paid) only takes place around three times a year, and practically no training (not paid). The time of travelling and the other expenses are not reimbursed. (Indeed, a computer and a mobile phone are essential in order to complete the work.)

To summarize: during the period from 2012 to 2018, my colleagues and I, we are earning less and our working conditions and secondary considerations have deteriorated. Before I used to meet my colleagues every two weeks; almost no team meetings and we each work in people's homes, therefore few contacts with colleagues are possible, except sometimes, by chance, in the road, on the street.

Also some positive changes:

Fortunately, there is now a turning point. In my opinion, following the shortage of work in the jobs market and also because of political and social awareness of the importance of domiciliary care. So from

last year our salaries have been increased. Over a period of five years, salaries have been raised by more than 20%, which means that we are paid at the level we were ten years ago. Our organization wants again to work with small teams. Changes come slowly but something is moving. (Only, money is not following suit.)

Work in other sectors is also evolving

I see similar changes in other sectors in the Netherlands, for example: the postal service. With the liberalization of the market, different postal businesses are in competition with each other. Consequently, someone works there as an individual entrepreneur (independent without staff) with a short-term contract and a pathetic salary. There are hardly any full time workers with a permanent contract.

Computerization (digitalization) and internet shopping have resulted in the loss of employment for a great number of staff in shops and numerous vehicles travel the country with parcels. For large groups of people, the contract is short-term or temporary and the salary is low. People no longer work for the same boss all their lives. At the bottom of the ladder, several jobs are needed to make a sufficient living.

How has work changed me?

The 17 years that I have done domiciliary work have certainly changed me. I will try to sketch some lines:

When I started this work, I was shocked by the environment and the working conditions, by the fact that people were uneasy with me, and by the fact of being in contact with situations of misery and sadness. Now I am more used to it. That is not to say that the situations are less shocking, but it is no longer another world for me coming from the outside. It is the world in which I live each day. It is now also my world. A world in which people live. People who

have grief and worry, who also know joy, with tensions and conflicts but also comfort and welcome.

I do not hold a romantic vision of the poor. People who are on the edge of society are ordinary people with their beautiful and their less than beautiful side. In my personal life, I do not know anyone that I consider bad. Everyone I meet is truly worthwhile, whether rich or poor. The people at the bottom of the social ladder teach me that we are dependent and we need others (while those people with a good salary are proudly satisfied with being independent and not having need of anyone).

My work and my daily life influence my way of seeing politics and society. I have a little less compassion for the rich who invest. Equally, I think that people who earn a lot and live in luxury must take a step backwards, for example as far as the environment is concerned. I feel myself increasingly out of step, a stranger. For example, at the celebrations of birthdays of friends or family. I feel outside the loop when they declare the problems which bother them. But at the same time I feel equally estranged by the

relationship with the people with whom I am in daily contact. I realize that that comes from my training and my left wing leaning.



Seventeen years ago, I was a member of a team of colleagues with whom I was living closely. In fact, I had only occasional contact with my colleagues. Many colleagues have only a short-term contract. There were also many changes of staff. Thus I don't have the urge to be part of a group of colleagues. The work is more individual. This I find a shame.

Physically, work has also marked me. Cleaning two or three houses a day is relatively hard. I am noticing that I am getting older. And I do not know if my body can stand this work until my retirement. This definitely worries me (and my colleagues also).

However routine work and life have become, I have learned that it is important for me to continue to look and to listen. You could call this a contemplative way of being. Simply listening well and looking closely, I see small things, I notice them. These are the little things,

in my eyes, that are so important and full of meaning. The little things, signs which often stay invisible.

I like to be present in a useful way. To be for the other. For my work, I have noticed that I must put limits in order to keep going because sometimes people crush you or use you; that's something that isn't good, not for you, nor, in the final reckoning, I think, for themselves.

Herzogenrath 2019: A contribution from Spain

How am I (or are we) changed by our experience in a world of work affected by particular economic changes?

1. Jobs: rice-grower in the marshes of Cadix, painter and decorator, orderly in a psychiatric hospital, hospital nurse, teaching, administration in a farm and in the office of a chicken factory, bank employee, labourer in a multinational.
2. Working as a labourer forces one to “humble oneself” - to descend – like Jesus of Nazareth. It's an ethical stance to listen to the voice of victims, of the downtrodden of society. Work separates you from the clergy. You are only a worker after all with your salary: “The Messiah became human among humans, in human likeness” (Phil 2:7).
3. Work places you in the working class, due to having a salary, in a business and with an employer. Work which is barely creative takes up a large part of daily life. I chose one of the last categories: manual work. “Another will fasten a belt around you and lead you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18).
4. I have learned that it is necessary to transform oppressive capitalism, to be in permanent tension in real life, to have a critical vision, to build hope within the union, to hold on to

- utopia and spell out alternatives which change the structures. I have found renewed vision within ecosocialism and ecofeminism.
5. I have found the Gospel within very concrete realities. Theology was all abstract ideas: Church, neighbour, love, salvation, sin ... But reality is concrete. At work, the neighbour is Jean, Pierre ...; love is called solidarity or strike, sin is work without security, Church is to create living communities engaged or not in working or social life or the neighbourhood association Jesus of Nazareth is also our neighbour: "All the times you have helped these little ones who are my brothers, you have done it to me" (Matt 25:40).
 6. I feel like a stranger in the vast ecclesiastical institution with its culture of greatness, power and triumphalism ... completely different to the world of work ... "Master, look at these beautiful stones! All will be overturned, Jesus replied" (Luke 13:1).
 7. Vocation is the call of God through the needs of those at the bottom, and not of those at the top, of the workers and not only of the bishop; those who elected me to the Union, to citizens' bodies, to organizations ... to make that more just and compassionate life which is the Kingdom of God. It is a calling, a vocation. It is the mission of the gospel: "Heal the sick, give life

to the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out evil spirits” (Matt 10:8).



8. The holy place where God dwells is no longer the temple but the workplace, the street, the estate, the little people: the workforce, the unemployed, the excluded, the prisoners, the migrants, those who suffer, “I was ill, naked, in prison and you came to see me and you took care of me ... it is me that you have welcomed” (Matt 25:36f).
9. The Kingdom of God is revealed in the longing for justice, for the dignity of the underclass, of the marginalized areas, of the people in an irregular situation. We are going towards a Church on the margins, welcoming, of small communities. “The glory of God is a human being fully alive”, declared St Irenaeus (4th century).
10. I have discovered a torrential God, who floods his creatures, who has given us everything and who is always alongside us; not a deaf God, distant, punitive, manipulated by ecclesiastical and civil powers, whom we must obey and beg by our prayers.
11. Believers and non-believers admire Jesus of Nazareth, that’s the inheritance of humanity and not only of religions. His message of fellowship is a breath of fresh air in the struggles, in working

together, in grass roots movements for peace, ecology or feminism to make a world of friends (lit. brothers).

12. My spirituality is contemplative within action, within tension, within a permanent state of dialogue between Church and society; it is to discern what Jesus would do in every moment, to listen to people, to work with them to make society a human family. My holistic spirituality embraces our whole being, body and spirit, nature and everything. God continues to act within people: “Lord, we have seen a man who was driving out demons ... ‘Don’t stop him ... because the one who is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:38ff).
13. My faith is to build confidence in people and groups who are working for justice, peace and equality; those with their longings and their hopes are the salt and light which point towards a more humane life, the seed which makes the Gospel grow and speaks of the Kingdom.
14. Labouring work has transformed me into a completely different sort of priest: a worker with his lifestyle, his salary and in a community of believers and if it is my vocation within a family and children.
15. These days in retirement, we continue in the marginal world of today in groups for Peace, Solidarity, Justice and Peace, or for the homeless, the illegal ... and always in communities of faith.

In the experience of work, “humbling oneself” was the clay, and the world of work which has changed me was the potter.

Borderlands: thoughts on the 2019 European Worker Priests’ Conference - Margaret Trivasse

This year’s conference took place in Herzogenrath, near Aachen in Germany. The Saturday afternoon visit was to a community project in Kerkrade, in the Netherlands. I was

fascinated not to experience any actual border crossing as our bus rolled along the road. Used to the bureaucracy of the UK Border Force, I was expecting a checkpoint or at the very least a sign indicating that we had changed country, but we drove imperceptibly from one country to another. It was the same on all the trains I used; old films had conditioned me to expect border guards to jump on demanding passports whenever we crossed a border but there was no interruption.

Herzogenrath is truly a border town. Wikipedia summed up the distinction between Germany and the Netherlands at Kerkrade thus: “the national border in one section running along the middle of a main road and even directly through the centre of the cross-border Eurode office complex”. The entry continued: “Herzogenrath changed hands several times in the last few centuries. Together with the rest of the Southern Netherlands, it was under Spanish control from 1661, Austrian between 1713 and 1795 and French between 1795 and 1813. In 1815, when the Kingdom of the Netherlands was formed under the terms of the Vienna Congress, the border was drawn through the town, the eastern part being Prussian Herzogenrath and the western part Dutch Kerkrade”.

Crossing the border seemed so easy. In a climate of Brexit where divisions seem more important than smooth passage, being in such a place was refreshing. Physical borders were not the only significant cause for my reflections. We were from eight countries. Almost all the proceedings were conducted in German or French, with English appearing only in small-group work or conversations. But language differences did not hinder us getting along. A remarkable amount can be conveyed by body language (as counsellors are taught from the beginning of

our training!). We have a common purpose which unites us, to live out the Gospel in our working lives. This unspoken information about each other means that we start off on common ground. Borders of nationality can be overcome. Some of our encounters were deep and meaningful and went beyond language.



The local Bishop sharing a joke

As has been noted previously, the European Worker Priests are different from the MSEs of CHRISM. Most of them have deliberately taken low-paid jobs and live and work alongside their work colleagues in the poorer areas of their towns. They have a strong theology of presence (“not for but with”). They are an inspiration and cause for thought. Would I be prepared to do that? Is it enough to live alongside the poor without trying to tackle the systems which maintain poverty? Some are active in unions and do fight for better conditions. It was interesting to note one or two comments to the effect that although individuals lived alongside those who are struggling economically and sharing in the difficulties, they nevertheless

did not feel that they completely belonged. And it was rare for them to feel they belonged in the institutional church either. I suspect this is familiar! They – and we MSEs - dwell in borderlands where there is fluidity, a fluctuating sense of belonging, places where we can be both, or neither. The borderland can be uncertain and insecure but also a fertile ground for God's creative Spirit.

Reflections on Pentecost at Herzogenrath – Marianne Hayward

This year's European Worker Priests conference was held at Herzogenrath in Germany over the Pentecost weekend. The theme of how we're changed by our experiences in a world of work affected by particular economic changes prompted what I'm told was an unusually personal tone to the papers prepared as a basis for our reflections, as well as conversations at the conference itself. Compared to last year's conference in Manchester, the discussions I was part of certainly seemed less overtly political and more personal.

One of the themes of my experience of the weekend was the relationship between difference and shared understanding. To my shame I was one of the few present who couldn't communicate competently in either French or German, so relied heavily on Hugh Williams, who translated nearly everything into English for me. Despite the linguistic challenges I felt fully part of the conference and able to actively participate however – in fact even my rusty GCSE French often gave me a reasonable idea what was being discussed!

Although I felt unsure how to respond to the question posed by the conference theme, as the weekend progressed I was aware of my articulation of how my particular way of being a psychiatrist and doing my job expresses my Christian values crystallising more

clearly. The obvious commitment and sacrifice of those living out the traditional Worker Priest model of ministry through low paid work always challenges me as a privileged, professional person, but the recognition that I was seeking to express the same values in my work - such as being present with people and living out God's 'option for the poor' - was very encouraging.



This sense of both commonality and difference is summed up for me in one of my strongest memories of the conference – that of a halting but very moving conversation with one of the (non-English speaking) Germans, who told me that despite the differences in our situations he could see that we were motivated by the same values and encouraged me to continue in my work and ministry.

The Future of International Worker Priest Conferences 2020 - *Phil Aspinall*

During the conference at Pentecost there was the usual discussion about the future of the movement. The French have offered to host a conference in 2020.

Because of the timing of other meetings, and avoiding the commitments some people have at Pentecost, the preferred date is the weekend of the 18th – 20th September 2020. The French are

investigating suitable venues, but it is likely to be in Paris or Lille (both convenient for Eurostar!).



A planning meeting has been proposed as usual, and a small preparation group will meet on the 31st January in Paris. This date has been chosen to enable the participants to join the annual conference of the French Worker Priests who are in work (POAP) over the weekend of 1st – 2nd February.

The conference will be concentrated over the weekend to minimise the disruption for people in work. But it was proposed that visits be arranged for those who can stay longer before or after the core weekend (as we had organised at Manchester last year).

We were not asked to put forward possible themes at the end of this year's conference, so the theme will be discussed at the planning meeting. But do please contact me if you have any suggestions for themes for the 2020 conference, and for the written contributions.

And do please make a note of the September date in your diary – and think about coming to join us

Obituary – Peter Johnson RIP

As we noted in the last Ministers-at-Work, we were very sad to learn of the death of Peter Johnson in December last year. Peter was Moderator of CHRISM for a period, and organised two highly successful conferences in his part of the world: one at Redruth near St Ives in 2003 and the other in Bristol at the University of the West of England in 2010. We are grateful for all that Peter contributed to the life of CHRISM.

The following tribute contains contributions from Michael Webb who gave the eulogy at Peter's funeral, from Peter's daughter Rebecca and from Peter himself.

In his book 'Priest of the Profane', Peter wrote of a dream he had whilst testing his vocation to become a Franciscan friar. Climbing a hill, he reached a crossroads. From there he could see himself going on up dressed as an Anglican friar but looking the other way he could see himself walking down towards a plain and 'a house in which were a wife and two children.' In the dream he hesitated as to which path to take but in the morning his mind was made up and he left the Friary.

Hesitation, or if you prefer deep thought and rigorous questioning, were always a part of Peter's makeup. No easy choices for him. Every day it seemed Peter wrestled with the direction he should take. Should he continue in primary teaching for which just qualified, should he give his life wholly to God by becoming a monk or should he perhaps use his beautiful voice and become a professional singer? In the end as we know, he chose to express his faith through his teaching and later by being ordained.

He taught at a number of schools in Cornwall after moving there with his wife Angela in 1979 and taking up a teaching post at St Petroc's C of E Primary School in Bodmin. From there he went on to teach at St Martin's C of E Primary School, Liskeard, then as deputy head of Indian Queens Primary School and finally as head

teacher of Ludgvan Community Primary School. In Bodmin he was a lay reader at St Petroc's Church and a member of the Lions Club.

He then worked for six years as Head of Staff Wellbeing for Cornwall County Council for school and social care staff. Following this he joined the Senior Management Team of Student Services in the University of the West of England as Head of Health, Wellbeing, Faith and Spirituality. He was a former trustee of Epiphany House, Truro and trustee of Godrey Arts Project as well as chairman of Cornwall Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. His PhD was in the promotion of spirituality in primary schools. Latterly he became vicar of West Kerrier benefice of four parishes.



Peter's life was a search to discover how he might serve God best with his gifts. Not that he would have said so, but he almost had too much to give, too many gifts. He had a big heart. He was a man of love, for Angela his soulmate without whom all the twists and turns of his life and career, he admitted, would not have been possible, and for all his family.

But that love stretched out much wider. To the countless children he taught, especially in Cornwall. How glad he was to be able to be back doing assemblies and irrepressibly speaking to 'ladies and jelly fish' - to the colleagues he worked with in school, governing bodies, in the County Council, at the Guild of Health and as a University Chaplain. But it was more than wanting just a benign warm feeling, or to be a productive organisation - he wanted them to grow to develop their own sense of God's presence in their lives. His ambition was for human flourishing and that there should be small

but real signs of the Kingdom of heaven breaking through here and now.

He was too a man of deep faith which went beyond the merely conventional - to be in Jesus' name a risk taker. When he was finally ordained in 2000 it was not to a conventional role of parish, stipend and vicarage. He took on the call to be a Minister in Secular Employment, to work alongside people in the 9-5 world and to help them discover and celebrate God in the ordinary with all the cost and risks that entailed. How appropriate that his funeral was in St Breaca's church with its magnificent and recently restored medieval wall painting of Christ the Worker.



But Peter was no plaster saint. Like us all he had his failings, he took wrong turnings and knew things could have been better done. He was no uncritical friend of management or hierarchy and we can be sure he gave them some headaches. But all was motivated by his love and his faith and his belief that God wants us to grow and flourish as far as we are able. Perhaps the best way to thank Peter is by being challenged to be the best that God wants us to be in the future.

Peter had so much more still to give and we deeply mourn his sudden passing. Yet in all his life, his family, his work as teacher,

manager, chaplain and priest, in his planning and PhD and all that deep thought, he never lost sight of our eternal destiny to so see God at work on earth that we shall be made ready to meet him face to face in heaven.

Peter died on the 2nd December 2018, and his funeral and memorial service was held at Breage Parish Church on 18th December.

The final sentence in his book, completed in January 2018 ends with the prophetic words, 'The journey continues.....'

Forthcoming Events

Dreams, Visions and Wineskins: Preparing for the Unknown Church **Britannia Country House Hotel, Manchester M20 2WG - 24th - 26th October 2019**

The Shared Ministry Conference gives you the opportunity to meet like-minded people, be inspired, and share views. The conference is open to all engaged in collaborative ministry. Last year a large number of both clergy and lay people, at all levels of church life, came together to explore the joys and challenges of collaborative ministry and mission, so please book early to avoid disappointment. The conference this year will be held at *Britannia Country House Hotel and spa, Didsbury M20 2WG*. There will be use of a swimming pool.

The conference runs from midday on 24th October to lunchtime on 26th October 2019. Britannia Hotel: full board for the complete conference will be £190 for a standard ensuite room. Day and half - day rates are also available - please contact the conference administrator to discuss your specific requirements. Places are allocated on a first-come first-served basis!

Booking forms available at: www.shared-ministry.net or email the
Conference Administrator:
ColinMcCartytest_and_eval@btinternet.com

And Finally.....

Journeying

Mist lying soft over the morning fields
Under weak morning sun.
Fences and fields,
A wooded stream,
Peace,
Are followed by
Urban mud and puddles.
Heavy movement,
Flashing lights
Among the dark sheds:
Life as we know it...

Pale shadow-eyed unsmiling
She stumbles through,
Seeming untouched by the calm
Confidence,
Of her neighbour.
Wading through fog
To make briefest transactions...

Why?
Too early, or too late?
Some errant microbe?
Physiology?
Who knows?

Meanwhile another,
Dressed for warmth,
Flat shoes,

Walks smartly off
To help,
Beginning knitting networks...

In thick mist,
Strange shadows are the trees
Ploughed fields become blank pages.
In the real world
Around me, conversation ebbs and flows:
Injuries, surgery, work and fun.
Some read and others work
We will arrive, we're told.
How can he know?

We did..



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.

Membership Secretary

Ruth Brothwell Foxgrove, Burnt Common Lane, Ripley, Woking, Surrey, GU23 6HD revruthb@gmail.com 07825 432177

Submissions for the Journal (if electronic: .txt, .rtf, or .doc format) should be sent to:

The Journal Editor
3 Belle Grove Place, Spital Tongues,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4LH

E-mail: Pauline.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk

Visit the CHRISM website:

www.chrism.org.uk

CHRISM Committee members:

Moderators

Joe Smith 16 Southlea Avenue, Bournemouth, BH6 3AB
Libraries/Museums 01202 424148 joe.smith@bournemouthlibraries.org.uk
Ruth Brothwell Foxgrove, Burnt Common Lane, Ripley, Guildford
Business Consultant GU23 6HD. ruthbrothwell@yahoo.co.uk
Rebecca Craven 201 Thornton Road, Manchester, M14 7NS
Lecturer, Manchester Dental School rebeccacraven@gmail.com

Secretary

Sue Cossey 1 Bye Mead, Emerson's Green, Bristol, BS16 7DL
Retired Insurance underwriter sue.cossey@yahoo.co.uk 0117 957 4267

Treasurer

Rob Fox 22 Queensbury Gate, Newcastle NE12 8JW
Tax Adviser rob.fox36@gmail.com 0191 366 8048

Journal Editor

Pauline Pearson 3 Belle Grove Place, Spital Tongues,
University Lecturer Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4LH 0191 232 5980

Committee Members

Phil Aspinall 139 Wiltshire Court, Nod Rise, Coventry, CV5 7JP
Process Risk Consultant philaspinall0@googlemail.com 024 7646 7509

Margaret Trivasse 114, Valley Mill Lane, Bury, BL9 9BY
Counsellor (NHS) margtriv@yahoo.co.uk 07796366220

Marianne Hayward 3 Tannery Court, Mirfield, W Yorkshire, WF14 9DR
Consultant Psychiatrist/Ordinand Marianne.hayward@talktalk.net
07904292993

Nick Yates 5 Halfway Cottages, Bath Road, Newbury, RG20 8NG
Retired GP inickyates1@btinternet.com 01488 658092

Peter King 49 Leinster Avenue, East Sheen, SW14 7JW
Judge kingpd@hotmail.com

Web Master

Martin Dryden Mont Ube House, St. Clement, Jersey, JE2 6QT
Director, Finance co. mont.ube.jsy@gmail.com

Patron

The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

