

# **Ministers-at-Work**

*The Journal for Christians in  
secular ministry*

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## **Editorial**

Another quarter has gone by so fast that it seems only moments since I was last putting fingers to keyboard.. We are getting into autumn, with the trees turning gold, and crisp mornings followed often, at least up here, by soggy afternoons. This quarter I'm pleased to have a good range of contributions to share with you, with promise of more for our next edition!

There are two very thought provoking articles to start with. The first is by Dorrie Johnson, who (partly in response to Derek Avery's article in the last Journal) explores the idea that we as MSEs are called to enter into the moment with the people around us – and as we integrate faith with daily life to set the people we are among free in a world that works for justice and travels towards the Kingdom. It would be interesting to know if this resonates with others among you – particularly perhaps those working in areas outside health and social care. More articles are always welcome!



Do you think of yourself as a Worker Priest (pace the laity and readers among our membership), or as a Non-Stipendiary or Self Supporting Minister? Perhaps you see yourself more as a Minister in Secular Employment? Or perhaps the E stands for Environments as not all of us are employed, with some consultants, some volunteers, some students and some retired but often politically/socially active among our membership. The second article which I want to highlight is by Dr Jenny Gage, in which she asks ‘What’s in a Name?’, and draws on her doctoral studies to weave a case for the term Priest in Secular Work. She concludes – perhaps not unexpectedly to the readership of this Journal - that our shared vocation is not focused on the church, but on all of life. Once again, your reflections and responses would be very welcome.

For me this comes at what might be called an interesting time. As those of you who read the *Church Times* may have noticed I am ‘going to the dark side’ as someone put it and becoming part-time stipendiary, having formally retired from my university work. However, I am continuing as an honorary nursing academic (*‘emerita’*) and see my roles as still very much informing each other, seeking to build bridges between faith and daily life, and helping people listen to local needs and opportunities - using these in the parish context to identify where God is already at work – and working to promote health and wellbeing in the widest sense.

Over the past year we have lost some longstanding members of our community, so it is good to have reports of the celebration of significant anniversaries for two relatively venerable MSEs – Richard Syms, celebrating 50 years as a priest and an actor, and Michael Skinner celebrating 40 years

as a worker priest. Both events sound to have been joyful and engaging.

In addition, Pat Mac reflects on her day at our summer Conference in Guildford, and we have another piece from the Herzogenrath meeting of the European Worker Priests, this time the prayers which Mario offered – which are well worth sharing. There is initial information about our Reflective Weekend next year in February in Staffordshire, which will be looking at our wellbeing – and how we as MSEs can both experience and share the fruits of the Spirit.

With this edition also comes our usual request for your subscription and any updated details: a surprising number, even of our established members, forget to tell us changed contact details and then wonder why we have stopped communicating! **If you know other MSE colleagues locally who aren't yet members, feel free to copy / print off the form and share it with them.**

*Pauline Pearson*



# **People Matter - enter into their moment - Dorrie Johnson**

This article was prompted by reading, in fairly quick succession, two published articles and two quotations. There were disparate aspects, linked but making different points and, oddly, they felt familiar.

The first article was written by Derek Avery<sup>1</sup> who writes of his pastoral ministry to individuals and families experiencing living with, or beside, someone with dementia. I responded to his mention of failing memories, particularly recent memories, associated with dementia. Avery has known people with dementia both professionally and in his own family – I, too, had a parent suffering with dementia.

I use the word suffering quite deliberately. Avery makes a vital point when he highlights the ease with which people with dementia can recall past events and often live - in their heads - in those times. He strongly advocates entering into their moment, as, for example, he makes some crucially important suggestions for conversation. Do not ask about recent events - ‘have you had your lunch?’ (the person may not remember and be distressed). Rather ask, ‘are you hungry?’ We should also remember that someone who has dementia may believe he or she is living back in a previous time as later memories are lost.

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<sup>1</sup> Avery, Derek. *Working with individuals and families affected by a diagnosis of dementia*. Ministers-at-Work,

July 2019

My mother was the daughter of Salvation Army Officers. Repeatedly, she would ask, ‘is Dad home from the meeting yet?’ As repeatedly we would explain that her father was no longer alive and watch as she grieved again only to forget and repeat the question. If we had known then, as I learned only months after her death, that we should enter into her moment, assure her he’d not be long, she would have been happy and satisfied. That is why I believe she suffered with her dementia. If you have not had the opportunity, please read Avery’s article. It deserves a wide audience.

Enter into their moment.

In the second article, entitled ‘Could you be a prison chaplain?’<sup>2</sup> the author describes how many Quaker prison chaplains have begun regular ‘quiet times’ for silence and reflection. An inset in the article describes an experience of Ruth, one of the chaplains. She concludes people matter. I quote ‘I have listened, laughed, cried and empathised with the men and staff in prison ... a young man had died in the prison. He had been coming to the quiet group ... some of his friends still attend. ... I was asked to do a memorial service for him ... (this) had at its heart a short Quaker silence. This silence was intense and full of deep meaning. ... At the next group session one of the older men said that the very fact that the man was remembered this way made him feel that he, himself mattered and he hadn’t felt that he mattered to anyone for the 28 years he had been in prison’.

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<sup>2</sup> Schepers, Marleen. *Could you be a hospital chaplain?* Quaker News. No 101. Friends House. London.

Autumn 2018.

The inset concludes with the words, ‘That gathered silence for the young man and the ministry given by the older man are the reasons I am a chaplain. People matter’.

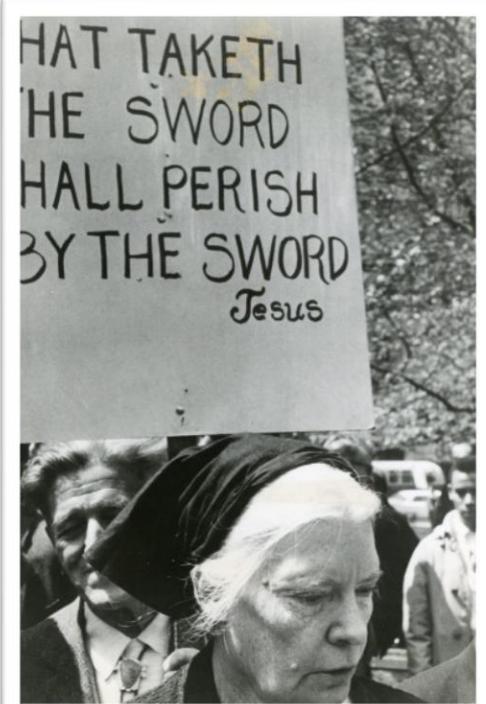
People matter.

The first of the two quotations I read states that ‘We have to be people who set each other free.’ This caught my attention but I knew nothing of the author, Harry Hay. This is not the place to provide a biography but briefly he was born in Sussex, moved to Chile (where his father had been manager of a copper mine) at the outbreak of WWI and later to California. He found work on a cargo ship at 14, having convinced union officials that he was 21.

Hay met and had his first sexual encounter aged 21 with a man who introduced him to the concept of a ‘secret global brotherhood’. From then on Hay worked to satisfactorily find a name that adequately gave identity to this group of men, if indeed they formed a discrete group, as he was often challenged. Hay entertained many controversial ideas and not a few contentious support networks. Hay’s life and being led to the quotation which caught my eye: ‘We have to be people who set each other free. While one group of people are belittled, enslaved, ostracised then society does not bring freedom however liberal it thinks it is.’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hay, Harry (1997). Roscoe, Will (ed.), *Radically Gay*, Beacon Press, p. 362



The second quotation is different in tone and purpose – ‘I’m working towards a world in which it would be easier for people to behave decently.’ The author was Dorothy Day. Day was an American journalist, social activist and Catholic convert. As above, this is not the place for a biography<sup>4</sup> but she became known as a political radical and very influential in the American Catholic

Church. In 1927 she was imprisoned as a member of the American suffragist movement the Silent Sentinels. In the 1930s Day was involved with the Catholic worker Movement and co-founded the Catholic Worker Newspaper.

This newspaper was aimed at, supported, those whose suffering was deepest in the Great Depression. It covered

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<sup>4</sup> Day’s autobiography *The Long Loneliness* 1952 in 1952 by Harper & Brothers. Day’s account of the Catholic Worker Movement *Loaves and Fishes* was published New York: Harper & Row 1963.

strikes, women and black workers needs and pursued social issues. Day's life was motivated by her faith and the need to free people from poverty, from ostracism caused by any discrimination, her hatred of misused power and the belief that non-violence was imperative in any fight for a fair society. She wanted to change attitudes.

'I'm working towards a world in which it would be easier for people to behave decently.'

....

These four encounters began to resonate in my mind with MSE principles and values. Don't we, in our ministry (a ministry that can continue after retirement) try to 'enter into the moment' when interacting with fellow workers? We don't tell people what to do, we don't preach (at least I hope we don't), we listen, we do try to 'hear', to grasp where people are, what they are experiencing and bring theological understanding to the situation. How can we engage with the person wherever he or she is, in what they are experiencing except, perhaps, by trying to see a situation from their perspective?

'People matter' is fundamental to our ministry whether above or below our 'status' in the workplace. I remember, from a CHRISM gathering many years ago, the agonising dilemma expressed by a prison chaplain. He was trying to decide if, as his conscience told him, he should become a whistle blower as this could possibly put his family at risk should he then be dismissed. Sometimes there isn't a clear way forward. I'm never tired of suggesting that one way of approaching this is to think - what is the most loving thing I can do in this situation? It isn't always clear but sometimes it can help to think through the situation.

'We have to be people who set each other free'. It can be very hard to break away from our upbringing, education, personal and social expectations. I recall the struggle a white junior nurse experienced when a black male manager was appointed. She faced her own prejudices and came out as a strong advocate for racial equality. Sometimes, maybe, we need to recognise that personal encounter with prejudice to free ourselves before we can free other people.

'I'm working towards a world in which it would be easier for people to behave decently'. This is another basic tenet of ministry in secular employment. All the mission statements, aims, objectives, flat-line-management in the world won't help if they only focus on commercial ambitions. The well-being of the work force could be - should be - at the heart of management.

The retired MSE is not exonerated, he or she comes into daily contact with 'workers' - window cleaners, check-out operatives, bin men, council officials, parish clergy, A&E staff, shop floor workers and so many others. They have working conditions, hopes and beliefs and reasons for being in their particular working situations. We are their customers just as much as those who purchase in millions of pounds are customers.

The introductory leaflet to Ministry in Secular Environment after posing the question - What do Ministers in Secular Environment (MSEs) do? - states that MSEs have opportunities to: influence events in the direction of the Kingdom; integrate faith with daily life; make themselves available to offer

confidential pastoral support; stand with those who need support and to ease burdens and help others realise joys.

That is why the concepts of entering into someone's moment, that people matter, of being people who set others free, of working towards a world where it would be easier to behave decently fit so well into the MSE mindset.

*Dorrie Johnson has been an MSE and a member of CHRISM for many years*



## What's in a name? – Jenny Gage

A few weeks ago, I received an email about a worker priest celebrating 50 years of priesthood. I did not note the precise words used, but I remember the significance of his self-identification as a worker priest. A rose by any other name

may smell as sweet, but naming ourselves is not to be dismissed so lightly.

At school, I was annoyed by those teachers who insisted on calling me Jennifer, rather than my own choice of Jenny. When I married the first time, I changed my last name. When I divorced, I changed it back again – a highly significant act – and when I remarried, it was again a deliberate choice to stick with my birth name. By then, I felt it to be part of my identity.

In this paper, I want to make the case for priest in secular work (PSW) as a form of identification, a name.

I recently completed a professional doctorate on what it means to be such a person. My research was born in a mid-morning coffee break in a library. Idly flicking through a book, I read about 1970s NSMs who struggled with the tension between their secular work and their priestly vocation (Hodge, 1983).

This resonated deeply with where I was at that point. I had been ordained deacon two or three months previously, and was still working in a secular job which I enjoyed immensely, and which I was not intending to give up any time soon. Although I had considered becoming a full-time stipendiary priest, it was not really possible, and as my curacy proceeded, I came to realise that the tension of holding together my secular work and my priestly vocation was not to be resolved, but rather to be embraced. I further realised that embracing it meant working out what it meant, for myself of course, but also for others like me, and ultimately for the church – hence the research.

It matters that the church thinks seriously about the nature of vocation which is contextualised in the secular world of work as well as in the institutional church, because such thinking contributes to questions about the nature of discipleship, and the ministry of the baptised who are not ordained. It also matters to us that the church understands that we have a specific vocation, which is necessary to the church, and that we are not there simply to occupy an altar or a pulpit.

Many lay Christians, consciously or otherwise, keep their working lives and their church lives separate, other than trying to follow Christian values generally, and perhaps remembering colleagues in prayer. Doctoral research undertaken by Diana Garfield (2011) showed that it was not uncommon for people to feel that the church had failed to give them the tools they needed to integrate them. She concluded that the church's focus on ordained ministry in previous decades was the main reason for this.

In 1983, Hodge's report claimed that any potential benefits of ordaining NSMs who would continue to work in secular workplaces was "inhibited by the traditional understanding of priestly ministry which is part of our cultural heritage. It is the parochial model which remains dominant in the minds of us all – non-stipendiary and stipendiary clergy, lay Church members, and in society at large" (Hodge, 1983: 86). Teresa Morgan's 2010 survey of self-supporting ministry found that little had changed: "Far too often, it seems, dioceses train ordinands – at considerable expense – ordain them and place them in a parish or chaplaincy, and then simply forget about them" (Morgan, 2011: 12).

Since the 1980s, some 20-30% of licensed clergy have been self-supporting, many of them employed in the secular world, and yet the church fails to understand adequately the distinctive nature of our vocation. This is not simply about personnel management, or resourcing the church, but goes right to the heart of our theology, to our beliefs about God and ministry.

## **My research project**

In 2012, I embarked on a professional doctorate, in which I hoped to explore such questions in depth. 28 people, all priests in the C of E (apart from one, who was in the Church in Wales at the time), and all employed in secular workplaces, contributed, including six who took part in an in-depth interview process.

As I worked on my data, I found that the term I was using to refer to my participants was evolving. Initially, I used MSE, minister in secular employment. However, it wasn't long before I realised that the word 'minister' wasn't quite right. Following early conversations with an inquiry group who helped me in the early stages of the research, I started to use M/PSE, minister/priest in secular employment. This reflected our awareness that we are priests in the workplace, not simply people who have a ministry. Over time, it became apparent that this conviction was shared by all but one of my participants, and so I dropped the M, referring simply to PSEs, priests in secular employment.

At a late stage in my analysis, it became clear to me that it is not our employment that is important, but our work. Some of my participants were no longer in paid employment, but they

were still engaged in work for a significant proportion of their time. For all, the nature of the work itself mattered, not simply that it paid the bills. I therefore coined the name priest in secular work, PSW.

Why not worker priests, however? The worker priests in post-war France, and those in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s deliberately worked in low paid, low status jobs, alongside ordinary working men (it was mostly men), as a way of modelling solidarity with them. In contrast, the men who were ordained as NSMs in the 1970s were expected to remain in their mainly professional secular occupations, while contributing to the ministry of the church. Neither form of ministry was successful in embedding itself in the C of E.



So what is different about the PSW?

In my research, I chose three questions from John 1 to characterise what it means to be a PSW:

Who are you? (John 1.19-22a)

What do you seek? (John 1.35-38a, 40-42)

## Where are you staying? (John 1.32-36, 38b-39)

'Who are you?' focused on PSWs' sense that their ordination as priest confirmed a fundamental aspect of their identity before God, that it was God who was responsible for their priestly vocation. I found that distinctions between being and doing were unhelpful, because in the doing was the becoming, resulting in all my interviewees talking of ontological change whether they had expected it or not.

The question 'What do you seek?' enabled me to focus on the desire to find God through being in the world, being committed to work for its own sake, while accepting the cost that may entail. My interviewees celebrated being able to use



their God-given gifts through their secular work, which they considered to be God-given also. They talked about how doing their jobs was a means of proclaiming God to the world, even when they were in contexts where they were not able to acknowledge their faith openly: "I could make God explicit by making the love of God ... explicit or more explicit to that person, without it being obvious to that person that we're

actually talking about the divine”. It is a way of asserting that “at a profound but simple level … religion is secular as well as religious”. The secular is not beyond God’s redemptive activity.

In the Greek, the word translated ‘staying’ is *menein*, with its resonances of abiding (eg. John 15). The apostle Andrew’s response to Jesus, “Where are you staying?”, brings into being the messianic community of those who will stay with/abide in Jesus. PSWs are part of that community, but they place themselves between the church and the world outside the church, deliberately living in the ambiguity of such a place in order to model connectedness with God in all of life.

In the end, the PSW vocation is not focused on the church, but on all of life. We seek to participate in the *missio Dei* both through our secular work, and through our commitment to the life and worship of the institutional church: what one interviewee described as “the sacrament of offering up daily life for myself and others in the eucharist – not always at an altar – but in, so to speak, eucharistic moments when the everyday, the quotidian, becomes sacred”.

Or as another interviewee put it:

“One of the gifts of God, if one is a believer, is that he requires us to write our lives across the sky. By which I think I mean that why or what we do may be of little worth in some ways, and we shouldn’t insist that it’s different from that. Nevertheless, it’s as though it is of huge worth …”.

Garfield, D., 2011. *Neo-Platonic Dualism to Postmodern Fragmentation? A Narrative Inquiry Into Construction and*

*Expression of Self-Identity in Lay Christians in a Contemporary Secular Workplace.* PhD. Cambridge, UK: Anglia Ruskin University.

Hodge, M., 1983. *Non-Stipendiary Ministry in the Church of England.* London, UK: The General Synod of the Church of England.

Morgan, T., 2011. *Self-Supporting Ministry in the Church of England and the Anglican Churches of Wales, Scotland and Ireland.* <http://www.littlemorechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SSM-Report.pdf>. Accessed 10 October 2019.

*Revd Dr Jenny Gage is Minister for Social Justice, Ely Cathedral and Bishop's Officer for Self-Supporting Ministry, Diocese of Ely*



## **Gold and Ruby MSE Celebrations!**

Richard Syms, one of Britains "first worker priests" (see the John Mantle book!) celebrated 50 years as a priest and 40 years of working in theatre, TV, film etc with a jubilee eucharist at the actors church - St Paul's Covent Garden - on Friday, September 27th at 7.30 pm.

Michael Skinner was a founder member of CHRISM and successively Secretary and Moderator – he spent 20 years as a worker priest until he took up a stipendiary appointment on retiring from secular employment. He completed 40 years as a priest at Michaelmas and had his celebrations on the same day as Richard and only a mile or so away at St Matthew Westminster. Optimistically he said: ‘Mine starts at 6.30 p.m. so the energetic could run from one to the other!!’

CHRISM’s correspondents were present at both celebrations but didn’t try to run between!

Margaret Joachim represented us at Richard’s celebration and reports:

‘I went to Richard Syms’ 50<sup>th</sup> – splendid! Lots of his friends ‘in the business’ (show business) were there, and instead of a sermon we had half a dozen performances of everything from Betjemania and Steven Sondheim to Henry Miller and Barack Obama, by a collection of people some of whom even I had heard of.’

We have asked Richard if he will write something for our next edition on being MSE and actor – which should be fascinating....

Meanwhile, Phil Aspinall represented us at Michael Skinner's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, and writes:

'Michael Skinner's 40th Anniversary mass on Friday night was a splendid affair, with a Mozart mass as a bonus. Michael sent his best wishes to all who would remember him. We reminisced about when we had first met, and the period when we had held committee meetings at St Matthew's Westminster.'

## **My Day at the CHRISM Conference on Saturday July 2<sup>nd</sup> – Pat Mac**

I felt that God wanted me to be there as all the travelling and its timing were so bang on. I was just amazed to arrive not long before the first session was due to start.

I felt uneasy about answering any of the questions about my job because I'm retired but was interested by the discussion. The enthusiasm and creativity and concern for ordinary people they were in contact with.

The feedback got me in amazement at the different facets people had for how to behave towards others. It was a humbling experience.

I felt very welcome and was so grateful to be included when it was lunchtime.

In the afternoon I was with the group which visited Woking Railway Station. It must have had a good and healthy impact because on the way back- by rail from Woking Station-I thought of all those people behind the scenes making it possible to travel from one place to another. I thought of the

concern and availability of all the folk who work on the railway - even that kind man who showed me to the lift at Waterloo so that I was near to the stop where I catch the bus home. He didn't have to leave his information desk and take me to the lift-but he did.

Many thanks to all the people who are part of CHRISM. It makes me want to thank God for all on this earth who want to take part in working for the Kingdom.

## **Morning Prayers: Changed by our experience in the World of Work**

*As used at the International Worker Priest Conference,  
Herzogenrath, Monday 10th June 2019*

*Over the weekend we were discussing our own experiences of work and so, we made this the focus of our morning prayer. So we pray for this world of work, for our work and for all those who have to work.*

*The prayers use the format adopted by Mario, one of the Italian Worker Priests, in his paper written for the conference on the theme “to live the Beatitudes of the Gospel”. We sing after each prayer:*

### **Ubi Caritas et Amour; Ubi Caritas, Deus ibi est**

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

We pray for those who – in a rich society – struggle to achieve even the most basic standard of living / means of survival

Those who live with the uncertainty of zero-hours contracts  
For those who cannot find work, who cannot work – who struggle to support families and children, who have to use food banks  
For those who live simple lives – who chose to live outside our consumerist society in sympathy with those who are excluded

### **Ubi Caritas**

“Blessed are those who weep, for they will be comforted”  
We pray for those who find that the work around which they have built their lives is being taken away from them  
For those facing factory closures and redundancy – in UK for workers at Honda in Swindon and British Steel in Scunthorpe and Port Talbot

For all whose work has made them ill

### **Ubi Caritas**

“Happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth”  
We pray for those who find that they are components in a system (just numbers) rather than individual human beings  
For those who are bullied at work  
For those who walk gently on the earth with care for the environment and for creation  
For humble and caring bosses who do not impose or exploit others

## **Ubi Caritas**

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

We pray for business leaders who understand the needs of their workers and make decisions with justice and fairness

Those in the caring professions who keep on working with compassion despite the pressure of targets

## **Ubi Caritas**

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

We pray for those who formulate corporate policy with the best interests of the workforce at heart

For those who work from good motives and are not manipulative or self-seeking

For those who refuse to engage in unethical practices

## **Ubi Caritas**

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

We pray for all who work for peace and reconciliation in work places; for those who remove or work through confrontation

For negotiators and arbitrators, industrial relations specialists and employment lawyers who defend whistle-blowers, and trades unions spokespeople

## **Ubi Caritas**

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

We pray for those who fight for workers' rights - in Works Councils, in Trades Unions, in politics

Those who put the interests of others ahead of their own status and well-being

For all whistle blowers, especially those who lose their jobs because they spoke out

### **Ubi Caritas**



*Mario in his marquetry workshop*

## Forthcoming Events

### Reflective Weekend 2020: Looking after ourselves: Are you getting your five a day? The fruits of the Spirit for MSEs



The conference will have a broad focus on wellbeing, including the role of CHRISM in supporting MSEs. It will be held at Shallowford House in Staffordshire, which is the Lichfield Diocesan Retreat and Conference Centre. Shallowford House is a stunning 19th century building. The house and grounds 'offer space to meet with God, together with a strong focus on hospitality and warmth of welcome'. By car, Shallowford is about 3 miles from Junction 14 of the M6 - within an hour of Birmingham, Manchester or Stoke-on-Trent. The Shallowford postcode, ST15 0NZ, covers a large area, and should be used in conjunction with directions on their website. By train the nearest mainline station is Stafford, approximately 5 miles from Shallowford. A taxi from Stafford station costs about £12-15, but we will seek to arrange lifts.

## **Notice of CHRISM Extraordinary General Meeting 2020**

Following the resignation of Joe Smith from the post of presiding moderator, an extraordinary general meeting will be held at Shallowford on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020.

Apologies should, if possible, reach the secretary at least 24 hours before the meeting starts.

Agenda:

Acceptance of Joe Smith's resignation

Marianne Hayward

Secretary, CHRISM

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## **Book review:**

**Unravelling the Mysteries, Marjory Dobson,  
pp165; Stainer & Bell, 2019; £15.95; ISBN 978-0-85249-959-7**

From time to time CHRISM is sent a book to review. Usually there is an obvious connection to MSE and workplace ministry; in this case there isn't, however there are numerous indirect connections.

Marjory Dobson hails from County Durham and has been a Methodist Lay Preacher since the age of 20. She has produced a number of earlier works (*Singing the Faith*, *The Worship*

Cloud, Worship Live) and led worship in Durham, Bristol, Bradford and Scarborough. This is a collection of drama, hymns, poems, prayers, dialogue, reflections and stories exploring faith and doubt. Marjory has a particular concern for those who find a disconnect between faith and their image of the church, which leads to a parallel with MSE: she starts where people are at, with their day to day feelings and experiences.

The book is divided into 6 sections, each picking up a clear theme. The first, Unravelling the beginnings: finding the starting point, recognises the power of simple stories rooted in daily life and experience, and picks up the Biblical theme of creation from the perspective of 'Where is God in all this?' (my phrase). It recognises that how we understand creation and the natural world has developed and changed, and how it relates to us and to God, has changed, and reassures that it is OK to feel uncomfortable. Finding our own beginning point, or thread, is the key to understanding.

The second part, Unravelling faith: following the thread, is similarly reassuring that it is OK to doubt, a point reinforced later in the book. It starts by showing that we exercise and show faith in a daily lives: faith that the bus will come (more or less) according to the timetable, then uses the lives and experience of several people of faith to expand on what faith can mean. I particularly appreciated the calling of Moses set out as a job advert and the response to it! Others include Abraham, David, Amos, John the Baptist, Mary, the Magi.

The third part, Unravelling grace: winding the thread, looks at disentangling faith from form (which is often what puts people

off the churches). Christ is shown as revealing the face of God, with engaging reflections on Jesus' ministry, especially the temptation. The dialogues on the book are well-constructed, particularly in this section. Reflections include: Jesus as a 'local lad', what if he had come as a king?, on miracles and signs, how Pilate may have felt, and cross and resurrection. It finishes by addressing doubt and faith directly, using the example of Thomas.

Unravelling choices: finding knots, explores the choices we make in life and how faith relates to them. I liked the way Marjory approaches facing the consequences of our own actions head-on, "we cling to the things we know we should not own." Taking responsibility for our actions is well-handled (John the Baptist and Herod is used as an example), as are blame culture, money and "empty words". That we often find God disconcerting, particularly in the role of law-giver, but He is always open to us when we return (Prodigal Son). The section also covers loneliness, not listening, the word of God, and why love matters ("we run from those who fill us with disgust").

Unravelling sorrow: when the thread breaks follows naturally and looks at times of crisis. Plenty of Biblical references here (Hannah, the flight to Egypt, Cain and Abel, the woman who touched Jesus' garment). What Marjory emphasises most is the importance of listening, of not being swept along by events but being still and reflecting on what is happening and where God is in the mess.

The final section, Unravelling resurrection: making a new pattern, speaks of new life, Easter, resurrection, Pentecost.

Marjory's handling of the last is thoughtful and wise, suggesting that we choose the gifts and fruits of the Spirit we'd like (or need) with care, asking what gifts are appropriate to the circumstances we find ourselves in. There are thought-provoking items on prayer problems, not allowing ourselves to argue about words, the God who has called us, and being ready to serve. I most appreciated the piece on our role as doorkeepers: too often we see it as controlling entry, but it is really about opening the doors to those who cannot do it themselves.

From the point of view of being a worship and study resource in churches, this is as useful a collection as I've come across in a long while. Its approach of taking our doubts, fears and disillusion seriously and as starting points makes it accessible. My one reservation is that this is a book for those in churches or hovering on the edge. Notwithstanding the short but useful introductions to many of the pieces, it assumes that reader is 'churched' and has at least some idea of who the people and Biblical stories used are. Overall though it's use of story, the day-to-day and acknowledgement of our own doubts will make MSEs smile.

Rob Fox

## **Payment possibilities:**

CHRISM can accept payments through GoCardless. If you would like to use this please email the Treasurer at [rob.fox36@gmail.com](mailto:rob.fox36@gmail.com)

## **And Finally.....**

**City afternoon, 2019**

People passing, peering at the ground

Frail flowers fluttering feebly in the wind

Strong sounds sharply spilling all around.

A dancing dog denuded of a hand

To take it through tall trees and find

Home, hospitality and healing sound.

Buses and bicycles busy passing by

Scaffold surrounding spaces, shops nearby

Coffee in cafes as creators cry

Lone litter lying, all its meaning lost

Determined demonstrators talking as I pass

Clocks chiming, crossings bleeping till at last

The destination's reached:

I wish theirs could be.



CHRISM is on Facebook, 'Ministers at Work':

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/>

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<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)

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