

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

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## Editorial

Happy New Year – a new decade too! Once again, this quarter’s journal contains a profusion of material which I hope

you will find thought provoking and encouraging. There is no single theme, but a lot of commitment, passion and reflection.

First of all, the piece promised last time from Richard Syms who has just celebrated 50 years as a priest and an actor and is well known for a variety of roles in film and TV. He shares some reflections from what remains quite a busy life as he picks up opportunities to act and supports and cares for those among whom he works. Richard reminds us that the performing arts and the Eucharist are both about incarnation, making flesh what is beyond human, making visible what we cannot see, and saying the inexpressible.

Margaret Trivasse offers us a story drawing on her reflections on the flight into Egypt, and her work with refugees and asylum seekers. She quotes Paul Vallely's musing as to whether the Vietnamese asylum seekers who died in a refrigerated lorry would have received so much sympathy if they had survived: her story challenges us to confront the myths which abound and find ways of encouraging positives.

Phil offers a reflection generated when he received the first CHRISM publication translated into German and asks where should an MSE be on Christmas night? And Bill Lomas, a retired teacher, focuses on a European project for reconciliation - work to which he is passionately committed, which expresses one aspect of his outworking of 'Everyday Faith'.

Jim Francis has been reading a book called 'Vicar', and as a result muses on ministry in secular employment, recommending some other good reads along the way. Discussions at Ilbenstadt highlight three questions for us to

consider: With whom are we connected? Where do we search for allies for the thing for which we would give our all? And how do we create space in our daily lives for new current concerns? If this stimulates you to creativity, I would be pleased to hear from you.

Finally, we record the death of Willibald Jacob, a distinguished Protestant Minister in Secular Employment in Germany.

*Pauline Pearson*



## Ministry in the Performing Arts : Another Twenty Years: Richard Syms

It seems a very long time ago now, well, I suppose it was a very long time ago! In 1978, I stopped being a full-time parish priest, and went into 'the business' firstly as an actor, and then later as a theatre director. I retained my orders, and waited, in a way, to see what would happen. I wrote a book at the time 'Working Like the Rest of Us', not a very good one, frankly, indeed a rather angry little book, in which I got into trouble (probably rightly) for accusing the organised church of having lost the capacity to love, and therefore to serve community properly. A sense of betrayal I think of what we called the 'radical' theology and morality which drew many of us into the churches in the sixties. But it did mean I was counted by John Mantle in his book as one of 'Britain's first worker-priests' and I also made a contribution to an early collection of essays 'Tentmaking' on the subject of worker-priesthood. Whenever I was asked if I had lost my faith, I would often think 'No, but I probably will do, if I keep trying to fit my beliefs into the organisation I was supposed to be representing' Ten years later, I wrote a second, rather better book, 'The Ferris Wheel' in which I tried to strip down the fundamentals of the faith in a way that I thought might make sense to the people who were my work colleagues now.

Margaret Joachim reminded me (luckily) that I'd written a piece for Chrism twenty years ago, and re-reading it, I find that many of the things I said then still apply – I still have no agenda or blueprint for my ministry, still mostly reactive to whatever

God or my colleagues throw at me. It is still casual labour, like working on a series of building sites – when people say ‘You got paid how much for that little?’ they tend to forget that you might not see another cheque for six months. From my theatre chaplaincy days, before I jumped, I remember being aware of not sharing the precarious nature of the actor’s life, and of course, I found out. The seemingly endless letters, reminders to theatres, directors and casting directors that I’ve hit another spell of unemployment. In the early days, there were the reps, who would often employ you for three months at a time to do two or three shows at a time. That’s mostly all gone now, and certainly at my age, its mostly TV and film. Yes, still playing vicars, bishops even, but thankfully also recently, a good run of comedy bits and pieces in a variety of some quality shows. Some years back, I got to feel I could survive on a reasonable TV or film job once a month.



And I’m still committed to ministry ‘with’ rather than ministry ‘to’ And I’m still here for the same reason as ever - that I enjoy the people I work with, and value enormously the sense of community that they build. And partly for that reason, I’ve had spells of being involved with the union Equity, which I’ve

seen as very much part of the ministry. And increasingly, I'm able to do baptisms, weddings and increasingly sadly funerals for people I've known, worked with and loved. And I know that often means a great deal to others in the profession. Some years ago, I officiated at the funeral of a tragically young actor I'd worked with, and with a whole lot of mutual friends and colleagues present, and I remember stopping on the way home for a wind-down and a pint (as yer do) and once relaxed, had a sudden, warm and overwhelming feeling that I had been exactly the right person at exactly the right place at exactly the right time. That moment sustained me through a whole pile of later uncertainties.

And still a 'jobbing' actor, as they say. Though I guess, advancing (advanced?) age precludes things to some extent now. I think my days of touring are probably over, it's a tiring and sometimes tense way of life. But still often up for 'older parts' on television and so on (someone has to play them) and I have a good and enthusiastic agent, who still keeps me in front of the right people. And I am also the artistic director of a small professional theatre company based in Hertford, near where I live, which works on fairly local issues, by local writers, with local actors and touring to towns and villages round about, often, of course, linking up with local churches. So I work as and when I can, on any of the 'building sites' that can make use of me. And, I suppose, my ministry is often about following as many links as I can which the community of the business offers me.

And my relationship with the organised church? Well, I guess the anger of 1978 dissipated fairly quickly. Within a year or two, I knew that my personal opinions and hang-ups were unimportant compared to the purposes and mission of God

and the (I choose my word carefully) the mystery of his church. Though I do float a bit like a free spirit, one foot in, one out, which is a kind of hypocrisy of its own! I'm now on the staff of the Actors Church – St Pauls Covent Garden – the obvious place to be based, although I've been in and out of it for fifty years – John Hester, the rector there in the 60s, was very instrumental in encouraging me to make the jump into the profession. Now I commit myself to regular Sundays there, and obviously occasional services for people I know. On other Sundays, I have permission to officiate where I live in St Albans diocese, and can therefore be useful in a good number of parishes around me, during vacancies, sickness, or just where the poor country parish priest can't be in three places at once! And in that way, I've met some fine Christians and some open and welcoming communities. In quite a few churches, I've given talks and had discussions about my work and ministry, which has served for me as a way of 'reporting back'

And, if I may say so, the local funeral directors are very kind to an old actor/priest when he is, as they say, between jobs. And I still regard that, even though in a sense, it comes as a bread and butter issue, as a real privilege. Indeed, a few months back, I did a service for a lady who was a huge fan of West End musicals, and so had soaked her service with songs from the shows, and as I exited the chapel to the sweeping sounds of 'The Sound of Music', I remember being aware that in a sense what I had just done in the whole service was to make a play, a show, for a family whose feelings could not really be articulated in any other way. To express in concrete terms what is beyond words. And I know that the Mass itself is of course deeply interlinked with theatre and drama, in that it acts out the inexpressible mystery in an earthly,

comprehensible form. I suppose that's what all the arts do all the time, and the performing arts no less than the rest, a good play, a quality TV piece or film, can express, as Alexander Pope said 'what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed'. It's incarnation, making flesh what is beyond human, making visible what we cannot see, saying the inexpressible. And I still see it as a privilege as a worker-priest to share ministry with those who do that for a living and then to try to relate it back to the Christian communities who embody it, incarnate it in themselves.



## Asylum or Prison? – Margaret Trivasse

“Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

*Ahmed lies on his bed staring at the ceiling. The bed is the only piece of furniture in the room, and the springs poke through the mattress. He wants to sleep, but he can't. Every time he closes his eyes, he sees blood and body parts. He beats his head with his fist, trying to silence the voice in his head which says menacingly, "You're next. We're coming to kill you." If only there was something to do, something to distract him, but there is nothing. He has a basic phone but it can't get the internet. There is no television in the house.*

*Ahmed tries to change the images before his eyes but he only succeeds in seeing his mother, elderly and weeping. The tears begin to seep from his eyes. He gets up and paces the room. He crosses it in four paces, the length of the bed. He stares out of the window. It is raining. Again. He could walk to the shop and buy bread and maybe rice. His Aspen card was topped up yesterday so he has £37 to last him until next week. Rice, or a bus journey into town for a change of scene? He could perhaps call in at the solicitor's to ask if there is any news. But that would require him to find Mahmood first, to translate for him.*

*He sits down on the bed again, tired by the headache which never seems to go. The doctor said it was stress, but what if there is something really wrong? He wishes the doctor would send him for a scan. He isn't sure that what he said was translated properly. The doctor used an interpreter over the telephone. They always do that now; before they used to have someone face to face.*

*The door rattles. Was that a real knock, or the knocking he sometimes hears but then finds there is no-one there. He sighs and goes downstairs. The post has been delivered. Ahmed's pulse quickens. He riffles urgently through the pile of mail, looking for the typical brown envelope of the Home Office. A handful of white and multi-coloured envelopes, nothing which looks right. Another day with no news. A door opens further down the hall and a man comes out. Ahmed doesn't know his name and they don't speak the same language. He shrugs, drops the letters and trudges back upstairs. The other man picks up the letters and he too goes through them. Ahmed wishes he could speak some English so at least he and the other guys could share their frustration, but he hasn't been in the country six months so he isn't allowed to enrol for an official course yet and he doesn't know where the conversation classes run by voluntary groups meet.*



*Zippering up his thin jacket against the rain, Ahmed decides to forego the rice and heads for the bus stop. He stares out of the bus window, trying to fix the route in his mind. Maybe one day he will walk into town and save some money. He remembers the way to the takeaway where Mahmood works. He's in luck since Mahmood is serving and the lunchtime rush has passed. Mahmood's boss grudgingly says he can go for a cigarette break but looks meaningfully at his watch.*

*Mahmood lights up immediately and offers a cigarette to Ahmed. Ahmed doesn't smoke regularly but it sometimes helps when he is stressed, especially when he has to go for weekly signing on with the Home Office. Sometimes someone is detained at signing, which makes everybody tense. Usually, though, it's a quick affair, presided over by a bored official with a sour expression. But the build up to going for signing is agonizing; Ahmed usually can't eat the previous day.*

*Today Ahmed accepts the cigarette and pleads with Mahmood to go to the solicitor's with him. Mahmood shakes his head, giving a backwards gesture to his boss back in the café. Ahmed sighs and asks Mahmood about his family. Mahmood is a refugee who came to the UK via the UN Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. He has fulfilled the condition that a refugee "must have a well-founded fear of persecution ...."\* and has been given five years' leave to remain in the UK. He is therefore allowed to work. Ahmed does not begrudge Mahmood his status - after all, Mahmood was selected from a refugee camp because three of his children have disabilities - but sadly reflects that he has yet to prove to the satisfaction of the Home Office that he is still in danger because of his allegiance to an opposition group.*

*Mahmood's boss bangs on the window, and Mahmood tosses his butt into the gutter and heads back into the café. Ahmed pinches out the end of his cigarette and puts the remainder in his pocket for another time. He might as well go back to the house. He's not comfortable in crowds, and he recognizes one of the streets as a place where some local youths called out something which sounded abusive. They certainly didn't look friendly. The cigarette has taken the edge off his appetite, but he hasn't eaten anything so far today. He could make a cup of tea, and he thinks he might have an egg left if one of the other residents hasn't taken it from the fridge. Anyway, he's getting cold. Ahmed catches the bus back to a house he can never call home. The waiting continues.*

For the past eighteen years I have worked as a counsellor within the NHS. Although my caseload has always been generic, I have specialized in working with asylum seekers and refugees. More recently, my clients have also included people who have been trafficked. There was considerable public sympathy for the 39 Vietnamese people who died in a refrigerated lorry. Paul Vallely in the Church Times wondered whether there would be quite as much sympathy if they had all survived to seek asylum. I decided to write a piece which both captured my work and busted a few myths.

Ahmed and Mahmood are both composites rather than actual clients, but everything in the story has been reported by one or more clients. I see my primary task as listening with compassion, believing, witnessing and encouraging. More technically, I'm trying to help clients cope with the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and manage anxiety.

*\*The 1951 UN Convention states that someone is a refugee if "owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."*



Further reading:

The new odyssey, Patrick Kingsley

City of thorns, Ben Rawlence

The optician of Lampedusa, Emma Jane Kirby

The lightless sky, Gulwali Passarlay

## **The Prayer Diary at Christmas: Phil Aspinall**

CHRISM now has the first of its publications translated into German. I received among my Christmas presents a first copy of the German version of the prayer diary, prepared by Maria Jans-Wenstrup from the group of Working Brothers and Sisters, who attended the 2018 Manchester conference. As I reported previously, she has been working on the translation over the past year and has now adapted it into a new format which allows it to hang as a monthly calendar.

But while thinking of the diary at Christmas, you will, of course, be aware that the subject of our prayers on Christmas Day are “Workers in Essential Services”. A wise and

appropriate choice by those who compiled the list. I always find it striking, as an MSE, that Luke tells us that the message of the birth of Christ came first to those who were working that night, the shepherds.

Last year, as always, I sent a cheery Christmas email around the clients with whom I had worked during the year, and included many of the people who had attended training courses which I had run. Several responses came back to me including one from a technician working for an electricity supply company. He told me that he had “drawn the short straw” and was working Christmas night maintaining the supply of electricity to their customers and managing their back-up store of fuel oil – “keeping watch over their stocks by night” !

You might also have heard on the news this year about Jacob Young, the new MP for Redcar. Before being elected, he had been rostered to work Christmas night on the factory where he has been employed as a Lead Technician in the Petrochemicals industry – and so he still went in to work his shift, saying that he “couldn’t drop the lads in it”.

So it seems right that we should pray for people such as these at Christmas, as they go about their ministry in their secular work, and hope that the singing of angels is not far away. And it leads me to ask the provocative question: where should an MSE be on Christmas night?



*The piece which follows describes a piece of work to which the author is passionately committed, which reflects a part of his ongoing work as a (now retired) teacher, and expresses one aspect of his outworking of 'Everyday Faith'. Bill is also a churchwarden, a keen tennis player and volunteers with refugees and asylum seekers.*

## **Le Relais de la Memoire Meeting in Norden, Germany – November 7-9 2019 – Bill Lomas**

I spent all my teaching career at Dame Allan's Schools in Newcastle upon Tyne as a teacher of modern languages. I retired in 2011 but retained a close involvement with a European organisation which the school helped to set up nearly 20 years ago. This organisation is *Le Relais de la*

*Memoire*, founded by two inspirational French survivors of the holocaust, Abel and Yvette Farnoux. Fate threw Abel and Yvette together at the end of the war when he, following his escape from Buchenwald, somehow ended up as a lieutenant in the US army and played a significant role in the forces which liberated Auschwitz where Yvette was interned.

They then married and ever since have been staunch apologists for the European values of tolerance, humanity and resistance to injustice. They set up this Relais as a junior offshoot of the already established French Association des Resistants et Deportes and it was Dame Allan's that responded to the call from the British Council to be the UK representative with other schools from France, Germany, Austria and Poland. The aim of this group is to pass on the memories (hence the title) of witnesses and survivors of conflict to the younger generation in order to avoid the mistakes of the past. The motto for the organisation is "memory builds the future" or in French "la memoire construit le futur".

Le Relais meets twice a year, once in October/November and once in March. I have just returned from the meeting in Norden and I promised Pauline I would write a piece for CHRISM as the purpose and objectives of the occasion seemed perhaps to be of interest. Each year the 60 or 70 European students who attend the meeting choose a theme for their discussions - this year it was " Europe - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" - and a programme is drawn up by the host school, Ulrichsgymnasium in Norden, which reflects this theme and which the students can prepare for. There were initial welcomes from the town's Mayor and the Headmaster

both stressing the vital role a strong Europe must play in world affairs and in the maintenance of core European values.



Then there came a longer presentation, fascinating in its series of coincidences, as one of the German teachers of modern languages at the school gave, in English, an outline of why 9 November was such an important date in German history. As

far back as 1848, the year of revolutions in Europe, the liberal leader Robert Blum was executed. Then a matter of two days before the end of the first world war, the Kaiser abdicated, marking the end of the Hohenzollern dynasty and the foundation of the 1<sup>st</sup> republic: The so-called Weimar republic. In 1923 it marked the date of Hitler's putsch in Munich. And in 1938 it was the date of Kristallnacht, the night hundreds of Jews were murdered and 30,000 Jewish men incarcerated in camps. Finally in 1989 it was the date the Berlin Wall came down allowing at last after nearly 40 years of division Berlin to become once again a unified city and Germany to become once again a unified country and most important to allow so many families to become reunited. For all these coincidences November 9 is known in Germany as their Schicksalstag, their fateful day.

Much of what was expressed in this keynote speech was to concern the students over the next three days as these were key moments for all of Europe, not just Germany, and it is a kind of axiom for the organisation that we must look back in order to look forward more confidently. So it is that in all Relais meetings there are witnesses with stories to tell and the students choose which talk they would like to go to. They happen at the same time and the students make notes on what they hear and then report back in a later plenary session. The talk I went to was from a lady born in East Prussia who told her story of her parents who had to flee with her when the Russians began their counteroffensive towards the West. The whole matter of borders being flexible and territories changing hands and even names is very strange to Anglo-Saxon minds and would have been of great educational value to the 5 Dame Allan's students who heard the talk. Equally they will have been impressed by their discussions with the other European

students when they came to talk about the fall of the Berlin wall which they did in peer group sessions.



One of the set pieces of the meeting is the presentation of the work done in the various schools since the last meeting. These were excellent in both content and form – the Austrian school analysed the pogrom against the Jewish community in November 1938 and compared it chillingly to what happened at Chemnitz very recently when refugees were targeted in a similar way; the British school scrutinised the background to Brexit and the possible consequences leading to the conclusion

that Europe is bound to be weaker without the UK; one of the French schools celebrated the fall of the Berlin wall but warned that that positive development must be consolidated by a strong bond to hold Europe together; the German school told us of their project to make their school “ a school without racism and with courage” which will involve commitments from all working there – we will hear reports about progress in later meetings.

These meetings are not just about discussions and analysis, there is also a chance to be creative and artistic and on the second afternoon students divided up into groups for singing, dancing, drama, painting and poetry to prepare for presentations in those areas. They have only 3 hours of time to prepare but the results were amazing – the highlight for me being the Viennese school’s enacting of an imagined discussion, in outstanding English, of David Cameron, Theresa May and Boris Johnson on Brexit. Theresa May came on to the stage dancing and then coughed the whole time, it was very well done!

The final day was by far the most emotionally draining. It started with two films, one in German with English subtitles on the story of Erna de Vries, a survivor of the holocaust and the other in French on Anne Frank. I watched the film on Erna de Vries and it was difficult not to be moved by the experiences she had to endure. The films were followed by another about Norden in the time of the National Socialists and it was really troubling to see pictures of the main street in the town, where our hotel was situated, lined with cheering people and flags with swastikas.

After the film ended the German teacher in charge told us her story and why she was so committed to the Relais

organisation – her grandmother was half Jewish and her grandfather was a proud German who had served in the German army. He believed implicitly in all of Hitler’s propaganda and had no idea his wife was half Jewish. He was away fighting in the war and was not aware that his wife had been interned by the Nazis. When at the end of the war she was told that she was going to be saved by the Americans she just said that the Americans were the enemy – she couldn’t understand the situation. Equally when her husband returned from the war still saying they must not trust the Jews he was astonished to learn that his wife was half Jewish. He never came to terms with this and eventually committed suicide. This is just one story of many but was told with real feeling, in English. Another story was told by another teacher, this time in the form of a translation from a German memoir by Tanya Josefowitz whose escape to America in 1938 was related in both German and English.



We were then taken on a tour of Norden by guides who stopped at various points in this smallish town of about 25,000 inhabitants to indicate the series of events on Kristallnacht which took place exactly 81 years before. There had been 70

Jewish families living in Norden before the war, after there were none and today there are just two Jewish people living in the town. We saw houses and businesses that had been burnt and destroyed that night and heard terrifying accounts of the torture inflicted on the Jews themselves. All over the town there were cobble stones in the pavements, engraved with the names of those Jews who had lived there and how they had perished in the war. All over Germany there are thousands of these cobble stones. We also visited the Jewish cemetery, which, although once desecrated, has been, and continues to be, maintained by the people of Norden. In the evening we went to the site of the old synagogue, burnt down on Kristallnacht and not rebuilt but its site restored, and along with some hundred members of the Norden population, took part in a commemorative service led by a member of the regional Jewish committee. It was most moving and a privilege for this Anglo-Saxon and all the students, to share their grief.

In March there will be another meeting - in Paris.



## Where are your Networks? - Phil Aspinall

This was the theme of the October conference of the German Working Brothers and Sisters held at Ilbenstadt just outside Frankfurt.

So to begin – here are three questions for you:

- With whom are you connected (family, neighbourhood, unions, church, society, politics etc) ?
- Where do you search for allies for the thing for which you would give your all ?
- How do you create space in your daily life for new current concerns ?

There is no formal programme on the Friday evening - just a time for meeting, catching up, and mutual support. We also have the opportunity to stick our contributions on the “wall newspaper” – a very effective way of allowing people to post information about meetings, protests and conferences they have attended, and about new initiatives and developments in their lives. Several of us also created spider webs to show the various connections in our networks.

Much of Saturday is devoted to a round table where each person in turn shares their personal thoughts on the theme, the three questions above, and any changes in their life and work. In the diversity of such a broad group there were many very personal reflections and a great variety of networking, from the very local engagement with community projects and local neighbourhoods, to connections with international trades unions and countries, such as Brazil.



There were also many personal stories: one person who leaves her work in a Dusseldorf soup kitchen after many decades and reflects on the opportunities she now has for new things; another who has achieved great success in establishing employee representation in his workplace, only to find himself elected chair of the Works Council. And for many of the participants, these weekends are a key part of their networking – a space to come to gain support and encouragement, and a renewed sense of purpose.

There were some 28 participants (slightly larger than usual) gathered from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK - a mixture of lay, ordained, Roman Catholic and Protestant. The venue was, as always, the Haus St Gottfried, a huge former monastery now run as a conference centre in the countryside outside Frankfurt.

Following afternoon Coffee and Cake we go into small groups, having decided the topics, drawn out of the morning's reflections, in the previous plenary. I joined four others for a wide-ranging discussion around lack of time: no space for anything new, linked to the longing for silence and "being

present now”. (There is probably another article in this – or even a whole conference!)

There was worship throughout the weekend, with meditative morning prayer at the start of each day, and the Eucharist on the Saturday evening – also very gentle and reflective. The first session of morning prayer involved a very large ball of string which we threw or rolled to each other across the worship space – creating a network!

Sunday morning has a usual format of sharing news from the different countries (including, for me, a cross-examination over Brexit), but this time included a review of the International Conference and planning for both 2020 and for 2021 (which they propose to host again in Germany). We finished with a review of this weekend (in plenary) and proposals for the theme for the next meeting in the spring to be held over the weekend of the 8th – 10th May 2020. The autumn conference will be 30th Oct – 1st Nov.

## **A Reflection on MSE - James Francis**

I have just finished reading Alan Bartlett’s new book *Vicar. Celebrating the Renewal of Parish Ministry* (London, SPCK 2019). It is a splendid, imaginative and eminently readable exploration of incumbency from perspectives that are both scholarly and practical, drawing on the author’s long experience as a teacher of ordinands and a parish priest. There is much here for MSEs to appreciate and to learn, not least the splendid third chapter “What on earth is the church for?” and the fifth chapter on “Signs of the Kingdom”. That said, as I was reading I came up short at the author’s affirmation of those who had left employment for full-time parish ministry (page 146 “A giving

up to become a priest”). This may be because in my own career I left full time parish ministry (albeit in another denomination, the Church of Scotland) for a job in teaching.

And if I am honest my career in teaching, with subsequently a journey into Anglicanism and the privilege of a non-stipendiary curacy attached successively to two churches (twelve years in each), has fulfilled me in a way that I know parish ministry could not have done. Of course MSE is now well established, and I recognise the pathfinders who worked faithfully to have this expression of ordained ministry accepted. As John’s Gospel puts it (4.37) “Others have laboured and you are entered into their labour”. Yet in face of this thoughtful and generous book on the challenges and joys of parish ministry, and the many indeed who have left an employment to embark on stipendiary ministry, I am still led back to the mystery of vocation and the need (that somehow never quite seems to go away in the church’s mind) to explain MSE, and to affirm those who have been called to shape an ordained ministry within their daily life and work.

With this in mind, let me offer as an encouragement to all MSEs a quotation from Rowan Williams from his book *Open to Judgement. Sermons and Addresses* (London, DLT 1994). He has two essays on vocation and this is from the second one. He is speaking about calling and freedom (page 181), and how in our baptism and discipleship we choose how we shall grow. In this way our calling is something “free to be given to God and others”. He then goes on to say this (page 182): “It is natural and intelligible to seek to realise this freedom in working out disciplines in daily life. The most fundamental discipline is discipleship itself; but beyond that come the specific forms of what we usually call ‘states’ of life. Ordination, like marriage or

monasticism, is a 'state', still needing further precision; because there is no *one* way (his italics) of being a priest, any more than there is one way of being a monk or a nun or wife or husband or father or mother. These are wide categories of interpreting or moulding experience. I remember someone saying about a mutual friend, a priest, who had great musical gifts 'Perhaps he needs to discover his priesthood as a singer'. An odd remark, you may think; but an important insight there." What now if we inserted our own job, whatever it is, in place of "singer" in the sentence: "Perhaps (s)he needs discover her/his priesthood as a ...".

What I also find significant in this saying of Williams is that it does not relate singing to priesthood, which might seem obvious, but priesthood to singing, since (as he says) "there is *no* one way of being a priest". Likely at a selection conference we were asked "How will your work express your priesthood?". But perhaps we were never asked "How will your priesthood be informed, shaped and enriched by your work?". I wonder if the church that has ordained us has ever really grasped the latent and creative freedom that there is no one way of being a priest. (If an illustration would help, I recall hearing or reading about an MSE priest who was a surveyor



saying that he did not carry a cross in his work jacket but a slide rule in his cassock pocket.) The Ordinal gives us the “state” (to use Williams word) or condition, but how we express priesthood is about “the freedom we have in our calling” (as Williams describes it). A key question is how free do we feel, or indeed are allowed to feel, by the Church in our priesthood? Of course there is accountability in ministry, but discussion of that would best be left for another time.

While we may turn to the Ordinal for an understanding of priesthood another key source is the Maundy Thursday liturgy of the *Blessing of the Oils and Renewal of Vows*. In that liturgy it says this:

*Deacons, you were ordained so that the people of God may be better equipped to make Christ known. Will you continue to make the love of Christ visible through word and example and, having a particular care for those in need, fashion your life on Christ, who came not to be served but to serve?*

*Priests, you were ordained to lead God's people in the offering of praise and the proclamation of the gospel. Will you, knowing yourselves to be reconciled to God in Christ, continue to be instruments of God's peace in the church and in the world, and to minister the sacraments of the new covenant?*

With the above in mind, diaconal ministry might be summarised thus:

- a) that the people of God might be better equipped to make Christ known;
- b) manifesting the love of Christ through word and example;
- c) having a particular care for all amidst our human vulnerability.

And priestly ministry might be summarised thus:

- a) blessing (“the offering of praise and the proclamation of the gospel”).
- b) reconciling (“knowing yourselves to be reconciled to God in Christ”)
- c) building up/nurturing community (“continue to be instruments of God's peace in the church and in the world” – note the mention of “world” here).

And all this is focused in the authority of the church grounded in “ministering the sacraments of the new covenant”. Arguably the diaconal set is the foundation of the priestly set i.e. while blessing, reconciling, and upbuilding/nurturing come to evident expression in priestly ministry this is not a “higher” or “additional” range of ministry but is rooted in what it is to make Christ known (a blessing presence); manifesting the love of Christ (who draws us “into one” as God-ward and towards each other); and as having a care for all (in the divine strength which can work in our vulnerability through Christ in whom God’s love is vulnerable to us in our midst).

The characteristics of priestly ministry are thus to be found in an interweaving of blessing, reconciling and upbuilding/nurturing<sup>1</sup>. These three belong together in a Trinitarian way, they mutually illuminate and inform each other in the experience of God and the Kingdom, and any one cannot exist without the other two. To bless is to bless God

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<sup>1</sup> In a working life it is about *oikodomia* (what edifies, what establishes community) in the *oikonomia* of the world’s affairs (cf. J.A.T. Robinson *On Being the Church in the World* page 70). Others might prefer an organic image such as growing, tending and nurturing.

that He is be found in everything, and so to affirm the presence of God all around us. Such blessing of God's presence is, however, more than the acknowledgement of



presence – it is also transformative in the sense that it is a blessing that frees us into a right relationship with all things, and a blessing that leads to sharing and the finding of our true identity as human beings. Thus blessing draws in reconciliation. Reconciliation, thus understood, will be a manifestation of responding to God's presence for the sake of good working relationships, for the benefit of any and every community of work. And upbuilding/nurturing is also another key expression of God's presence and purpose, the consequence of which is not simply inclusion but being valued, made truly participant. What matters here in finding our identity is working with the appreciation of our diversity. The MSE will look for ways in which all these strands of blessing, reconciling and upbuilding/nurturing can be discovered in the context of work.

But to return to where we began, if this is the meaning of priesthood we have to reflect on how our respective work settings give it shape since “there is no *one* way of being a priest”. It is not just working out this vision of priesthood in a work setting as if it were applying a set of principles, but how

the work setting informs, shapes, directs and indeed inspires a priestly vocation. It will, by and large, be through telling stories that we will be able to express and explore this dynamic of how the workplace gives shape and depth to a priestly vocation. Most recently there is an article in the *Church Times* recording stories of ministry at work, albeit on the kindred movement of worker priests, (Hugh Williams “Clocking on: the world of the worker priest” *Church Times* 6<sup>th</sup> September 2019 pages 20-21.) It is really only through stories that insights are conveyed of how the workplace shapes the understanding of priesthood, and is not just the context in which a vocation to priesthood is worked out. But then telling stories is fundamental to who we are as human beings, as Rowan Williams again points out in his introduction to his book *Luminaries: Twenty Lives that Illuminate the Christian Way* (London, SPCK 2019). He says “It’s no accident that Jesus is remembered as a storyteller in the Gospels, and not just as a teacher of general truths” (page vii). This is where the motto of *Chrism* comes into its own (perhaps more than we realise), which is “To help ourselves and others to celebrate the presence of God and the holiness of life in our work, and to see and tell the Christian story there.”

I hope that MSEs will read the book and be informed and even inspired by it. But I also hope that they will be encouraged in their own ministries, especially in realising how the workplace itself shapes and enriches the understanding of priesthood in what it means to discover and to be there a presence of blessing, reconciling and upbuilding/nurturing.

## A Minister in Secular Employment in the German Democratic Republic - Phil Aspinall

We received the sad news from Germany of the death on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019 of **Willibald Jacob**. He was a significant figure in the European movement as one of a small group of Protestant Ministers in Secular Employment working in East Germany in the socialist times of the German Democratic Republic.

He was part of the network of the German Working Brothers and Sisters and I met him several times at the Ilbenstadt weekends. Over the years, I have bought, or been given, a couple of his books (only in German, I'm afraid) but there were many other publications and you can read more on his page on Wikipedia.

Several of the group attended his funeral in Berlin on 12<sup>th</sup> July. One of them wrote:

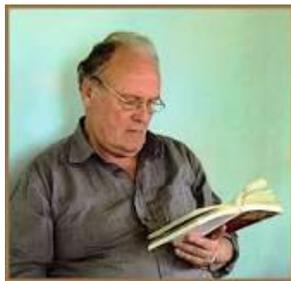
*It was good to join this service for Willibald and to thank God for this brother and this full life with his many struggles and many encounters. Willibald worked in a DDR road construction combine. I think he has paved the way. Sometimes he was also very much a "steamroller". But he has successfully built connections in his life: practical, political, intellectual, spiritual.*

And in "The Church", the weekly newspaper of the protestant church of Berlin/Brandenburg, our colleague Leh wrote:

*I have lost a brother with an open heart, on the side of the poor, inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, interested ecumenically since the World Council of Churches assembly in 1954, almost “prophetic” in his engagement for the one Church.*

Willibald Jacob knew how to talk about his life, saturated with experiences from the end of WWII, through his working life as an engineer on road construction projects. During this time he wrote “Worker Priest in the GDR” – “to work as a pastor in a factory is an attempt to live as a credible church for all”. He was often viewed with suspicion, in the west from the management perspective, in the east from the state services. Even in the churches these theologians remain marginal and were regarded as “exotic”.

In 1997 he was elected to parliament as a PDS candidate. This proved controversial and the newspaper Bild carried a headline – “Unmasked: Stasi-pastor sits in Parliament” – but he successfully challenged these false claims. He subsequently worked in India with projects for the Gossner Mission. One of his last campaigns, as part of the anniversary of the reformation, was for the long-overdue rehabilitation by the church of the “pastor and early protestant martyr” Thomas Munzer.



## **Forthcoming Events**

### **Reflective Weekend 21-23 February 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. Do contact Rob if you are interested even though it's getting late!

### **2020 Annual conference at Mirfield: 17th – 19th July 2020**

The Annual Conference speaker will be Gill Frigerio, on Career, calling & vocation. Gill is a Principal Teaching Fellow in the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Warwick, where she is Co-Director of the MA in Career Development and Coaching Studies. She has a scholarly interest in women's career development and how it intersects with issues of faith and calling. More details next time!

## And Finally.....



### Aidan

He came as a volunteer

A substitute even

To do a job.

He didn't

Assume he knew best.

He walked around

Listening hard, and talking,

Sharing his insights and ideas

With everyone.

Not going first for power,

Getting results fast

(Where have I seen that?)

But building relationships,  
Giving choice,  
Bridges to opportunity,  
Doors to hope  
For the future.



CHRISM is on Facebook, 'Ministers at Work':

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

and LinkedIn, at:

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

## **CHRISM is the National Association of CHRistians In Secular Ministry**

for **all** Christians who see their secular employment as their primary Christian ministry, and for those who support that vision. To further this aim, CHRISM publishes a quarterly Journal, releases occasional papers and organises an annual retreat. Conferences are held regularly and worldwide links pursued.

CHRISM welcomes members, both lay and ordained, from all Christian denominations, encourages them to be active within their own faith communities and to champion ministry in and through secular employment.

If you would like confidential support as an MSE, please contact any member of the Committee (see inside rear cover)

**Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or the Journal Editor.**

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