

Ministers-at-Work

The Journal for Christians in
secular ministry

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To help ourselves and others to celebrate the presence of God and the holiness of life in our work, and to see and tell the Christian story there.

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***Copy deadline for next edition: 14 July.
(You could say it is a guillotine!).***

At the Editor's desk

Not long after this edition has been mailed out I shall be traveling down to Nottingham for our Departmental Sports Club's annual Relay Race. Teams of four run over a three mile course around the rowing course by the River Trent. Runners can be seen almost all the way round and as they pass on the opposite bank loud shouts of encouragement ring out. I like relays. They need real team-work: in the organization of the event, agreeing the teams and running order, then in the run itself. Arranged carefully it is even possible to run legs for two different teams. It is always what Wallace would call "a grand day out"! We don't use a baton, but Dorrie Johnson's article captures what it is like to hand over: the relief at having done your part, and the knowledge that although another is on the next leg, the team's performance depends on each member. This happens to be my leg; thanks to the preceding members of the team we are in a healthy position. This Journal will only ever be as good as those who contribute to it, in whatever way. It is going to be pretty good then!

A recent storyline in the BBC's gentle Irish-based drama "Ballykissangel" drew my attention. One character, Avril, turned out to be an alcoholic who had been "on the wagon" for three years. The appearance of her ex-husband sorely tested her resolve and a bottle of whiskey was about to be downed when the local priest, Father Vincent, intervened. He prevented the whiskey from doing its work but was sent packing with the words "How could you possibly help me?" ringing in his ears. At the end of the episode Avril plucks up the courage to attend a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Sitting shiftily at the back, she watches a man stand up to relate his experience: "My name's Vincent, and I'm an alcoholic". We can guess what happens next!

It is not very often that we hear the people say out loud that "the Church" or Christians cannot help them because they do not know how it is to be in their shoes, but the message is never far

away, implicit in the background. So far as the experiences of work and the workplace go though, MSEs can and do share the everyday experiences of our colleagues and companions. We are part of the same community. We are there, usually implicitly, but always there, in ways the Church as institution cannot be. This is a truth Dennis Bickers, whose book is reviewed later in this edition, has grasped firmly.

There are times when people want and need to turn to something that is outside their day to day circle, but this is the exception. MSEs are there as part of day to day life, living what others live, feeling what others feel, learning what others learn. It takes a great deal of faith to seek out that which is outside the day to day; MSEs are there when faith falls short. To paraphrase the old Heineken slogan, MSEs reach the parts that other ministers cannot reach.

There is plenty of “Heineken” theology and practice in this edition, from Jim Cummins’ experience as a member of the farming community, through the reflections from the CHRISM Weekend at Holland House, to Rod Badams’ timely reminder of the relationship of ministry at work with the local church. I have had much enjoyment from editing this edition. I hope you enjoy it as much.

Rob Fox

Passing on the baton...

Dorrie Johnson

Many, many years ago I belonged to a large suburban church. It had been well attended if conventional and conservative (small c) but now it was changing. Young families were coming, we were one of them, and there were genuine attempts to encourage, I almost said seduce, young people on to the PCC. It was just at this time that rules governing churchwardenship also changed. One of the churchwardens who had served diligently and with love and integrity for more years than most knew, was not voted onto the PCC at the AGM.

The churchwarden had been elderly and frail but when he died shortly afterwards we all felt a communal sense of guilt. At the time his wife certainly blamed the younger PCC and the people who had not chosen him for his death. Churchwardenship had been his life. This story has a significance I will come back to later in this article.

I want to describe another scene. My partner's colleague retired after 30 plus years with the same educational organisation. Education is not static and it was undergoing considerable alteration when this man retired. However, almost every two or three weeks he went back to visit the department – disturbingly – for the roles and positions changed. His experience and memory gradually, but increasingly, were out of date. People too, began to be different. He was often not recognised. Those trying to work in the staff room met him with bewilderment and frustration. Who was this old man who kept coming in? This story, too, has a significance I will return to.

I retired from my full time work 2 years ago. Within the next year or so I resigned from the CHRISM Committee, from my own dearly loved diocesan MSE group, from the Board of Mission in the World of Work, from a(n occasional) visiting lecturer post at a theological college and from a few other work-faith related organisations. I remembered the story of the churchwarden. There must be a time to let go.

There must come a time too, when you have to trust the next generation with those things you have cared about, worried over, prayed through, believed in, lived for, almost. I could argue with the best of them that I still have the relevant experience, real interest, a willingness and ability to engage with the issues. However, I am no longer working therefore I am *not* an MSE, not involved in mission in the world of work, not speaking from current experience when I go to talk to ordinands. As it happens I was asked to undertake some projects for a number of different organisations and I am working again but that was accidental and

has a short life span.

Last year I attended a sub-group at a CHRISM Conference when we considered what retirement meant for the MSE. I addressed the possibility, suggested many times among CHRISM members, of using the acronym MSE to stand for Ministry in a Secular Environment a concept with which I have much sympathy. I could then still have applied the label MSE, but it would have been cheating in that particular context. I thought carefully about retirement and presented an argument which roughly advocated 'waiting on God' for information about what to do next. I meant it. I believed my own argument and acted accordingly, resigning painfully but genuinely, from work related positions and responsibilities and prepared to wait to see what happened next.

In the meanwhile, in my own diocese, the Bishop had outlined a vision of three forums – Social Responsibility, Parish Development and Evangelism and Ministry. The forums have just been established and are made up of lay and ordained people from across the diocese, from a mix of backgrounds and geographical locations. Each forum has a new director.

Last weekend I attended our diocesan synod and heard the director of ministry publicly support the concept of MSE. How I wished I were still such a person. MSE was being advocated in synod! I sat in my chair and heard a member of the diocesan MSE group from which I had so lately resigned, give a short talk promoting the concept that I had spent the last 20 years supporting. I watched and listened as people asked questions and were promised a visit to talk to this or that individual or group. And I wept inside. I felt desolate. It was one of the most wonderful (active promotion of MSE in front of a synod) and most painful (I used to do that – I know about that – I could do that) experiences of my ministry. I desperately wanted to be part of it. This is *my* life, this is *my* ministry, this is *my*...

... only it's not. It really is time to move away from it. It's time to let go.

No relay race would ever be completed if any individual runner held on to the baton. There has to be a beginning and in CHRISM this was really Michael Ranken. There has to be a finisher – who knows when and how and if that might be. But there have to be runners in between who are prepared to take the baton and run with it and when the time comes, pass it on to the next runner.

I found that synod day a very difficult experience, emotionally very demanding and yet I gloried in the knowledge that there are others runners who can take the baton – some of them we don't know yet; maybe they don't know that either, yet. In our diocese this is where the ministry forum and the vision of those serve on it will be vital.

But now I *know*, now I *feel* what retirement for MSEs is about. Having run the bit of the race for which I was responsible, it is the handing over of the baton to the next runner so that he or she may take a good strong hold of it and run on. The pace may be dissimilar, the form may differ from mine, the stride may be different but it will be just as real, just as important and may even be run better. And the realisation – the revelation - is liberating. The MSE baton is a glorious one to carry and God has willing runners. It is something to celebrate.

I will always be an MSE at heart and, I hope, go on writing and thinking theologically from the MSE perspective. The synod day was cathartic. But that day was also to be welcomed and when the baton is handed over you can slacken your pace, take a breath, stand back and watch – (and we are called to be watchers) and make perhaps more objective observations. You can also give thanks, both for the fact that you were given the baton for a while and that you've passed it on to another willing runner. There is another day to live – and that day will have its own opportunities.

So I won't keep going back to embarrass those going forward (though I cannot promise not to stand close on the sideline to

watch and pray and perhaps interrupt occasionally). I will do what, at the CHRISM conference, I said I would do. I will offer whatever gifts I have to God for whatever comes next. If nothing does, well, so be it, perhaps that book on spirituality and work may yet get written. If it does well, that's all right too. Perhaps God would rather I did not write too much. Either way, I've found out what retirement as an MSE is about. It's a time of transition yes, but maybe it's also a time of transformation. Perhaps it's a time of being not doing.

Retirement for this MSE is about handing over, and turning round to see if God has something else that needs picking up ...

More MSE stories

*Coventry has recently joined the list of Anglican Dioceses to produce a compilation of MSE stories. Entitled "Reflections on Ministry in Secular Employment" it includes pieces by seven varied MSEs, some of whom have transferred to MSE from stipendiary ministry, rounded off by a sympathetic contribution from the Director of Continuing Ministerial Education. Some of the MSEs featured will be familiar to CHRISM members as they include Dorrie Johnson, the globe-trotting Phil Aspinall, and **Felicity Smith**.*

Felicity has written a covering note to the booklet and there follows an edited version of this. It focuses on ordained MSE as it is aimed firstly at that readership.

There is an exciting and challenging area of the church's ministry of which few people seem to have heard and yet has been around for well over 20 years – Ministry in Secular Employment. This is a Non-Stipendiary Ministry with a different focus.

Ministers in Secular Employment are people who feel called and challenged by God to remain in their secular work, but with the added dimension of ordination to the priesthood. They do not

leave their jobs to “go into the church” (what would that say to the world of work?). No, we work at our theology ‘on the job’, we live out our vocation through meeting God at work.

We choose to share the daily lives of our work colleagues. We celebrate the presence of God and the Holiness of Life in our work and when appropriate we see and tell the Christian story there.

We believe that the God who is in the Mass on Sunday is the same caring sharing God who is in the mess on Monday and that the affirmation of God’s concern and involvement in every aspect of our lives is an essential ingredient of the ministry and mission and life of the Church.

MSEs all have a church base and therefore bring our ministry at work into our ‘church life’, thereby affirming the wholeness of the life of the worshipping community and helping them in turn to find God in their place of work. In interpreting this ministry we bring a theological resource to the church.

We are a small but significant and exciting group of Christians who would like more people to be aware of the possibilities and opportunities offered by the is form of ministry.

For a copy of the booklet please contact Phil Aspinall (details on the inside rear cover of the Journal).

Work and the local church

The following article is reproduced by kind permission from the April 2001 issue of net.working, the newsletter of Christians at Work. The writer, Rod Badams, is a former journalist and currently Administrator of the Fellowship of independent Evangelical Churches, having also served as Field Representative the General Secretary of Christians at Work.

For many Christians the church is regarded as the main place of Christian service, and the manning and staffing of the church's programme of activities the accurate measure of Christian usefulness and commitment.

Nothing in this article is intended to downplay the church-based programme. In the inner city, the market town, the suburban housing estate or rural village, a local church building and what takes place there is often the only awareness people will have of what the Christian faith is all about. Perhaps hundreds nearby will become familiar with the regular pattern of weekly activity and will know some of the people who are involved in the life of the church. Some will have attended a meeting or event – perhaps more than once. A vibrant church offers a constant opportunity for a range of evangelistic endeavours, both low key and higher profile, corporate and individual.

Having said this we need to be reminded of a number of incontrovertible truths about our own local church building:

1. We spend so little time there. Most Christians spend more time at home, and even more (of their waking hours) at their workplaces.
2. We meet far more non-Christians in our spheres of life away from the church than we do through our involvement in church activities.
3. Whereas our personal involvement in church activities is not indispensable, in that our place can be taken by others if we are ill or on holiday, our role within our families, among our neighbours and in our workplaces is unique. No one can deputise for us if we are not at the peak of our (spiritual) fitness and readiness.

Given these facts, ought we not to view the witness of the church in a more comprehensive way than we normally do, and be more deliberate and positive about the wide potential represented by the everyday responsibilities of all the church members throughout the whole of the week?

On Monday mornings the members of some larger churches are dispersed across 100 or more miles of territory, each with their own different group of colleagues and particular work obligations – whether they are high-flyers or in mundane grades or roles. Have you ever paused for a moment at work to think about where all your fellow-members are at that moment? Between the Pastor's second and third sermon on the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, some will have been to Munich and Milan, Hong Kong or Seattle, Dubai or Singapore. They will have met hundreds of people, had dozens of conversations, and faced any number of challenges to the biblical principles by which they seek to order their lives. In one way or another most of the people they meet will have seen their Christian lives in action, however fleetingly. With some there will have been opportunity for longer conversations, often initiated by a remark by the colleague or contact.

Is all this significant? or is it merely incidental detail? How should the church view it? Can the church do anything to enhance the effective testimony of the lives of its members in the world outside the church?

Of course it is significant. Young Christians in particular are always asking for prayer, or praying themselves, for God's guidance about their employment. They so want to be in the place where God would want them to be. They really believe that God has a place of work in mind which will be uniquely theirs, and that he has not only called them to a career, but to a specific location and set of circumstances in which to practice their calling. Hence their prayers, and their urgent pleas to Christian friends to join them in prayer.

One young man was overjoyed a few years ago when the way opened up for him to begin his career and there was abundant evidence and assurance that this was God's clear guidance. But when he announced the news to everyone it was in a tone which suggested that there was no need to pray any more, that all needs were fully met, all unknowns known, all doubts and difficulties at an end. Our young friend had rather missed the point of God's

guidance. When God guides in the personal circumstances of life he has an aim and purpose in view. God's planning is not for planning's sake alone. A more complex providence is being designed than we can grasp. The start of a job is not the time to call off the troops from prayer but to urge them afresh to pray in earnest.

How should the church view its members' responsibilities in the world outside the church? Churches should be understanding and enthusiastic about the working lives of their members, having a desire to encourage all of them to be Christ-like, useful and effective in whatever roles they have in life. Some church members have high-level responsibilities and significant opportunities to exercise a Christian influence upon others. The church should not be grudging about that, wishing instead that their gifted members were more available to undertake duties on the various rotas within the church programme.

Can the church do anything to enhance the effective testimony of the lives of its members in the world outside church? To be continued

Christians at Work is holding its annual Conference on Saturday 19 May, 11am – 5pm, at Rugby Baptist Church. Speaker is Dr. John Benton on “Being a Christian in the 9 to 5s”. More information from the c@w website: www.christiansatwork.org.uk.

My first encounter with CHRISM: Prue Dufour

The Holy Spirit said to them, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Acts 13.2

My background is nursing and for over 25 years I have been involved in the delivery and development of hospice care in this

country and overseas. I was ordained deacon last Michaelmas and my ministry is amongst those who care for the dying as the Director of St Columba's Fellowship. It was a source of wonder to me that the Lord should lead me to seek ordination, but His call, specific in its context, has been unmistakable to myself and others for many years now.

It presented a challenge, but there was nothing ambiguous about it. I saw it in terms of the verse quoted above. Only gradually did I recognise that a MSE vocation is not understood by the majority of the Church. When I declined to be categorised as pursuing a sector ministry such as chaplaincy based at a hospice (not an option anyway until one has *served a title* in Anglican terms), a NSM retaining a secular job whilst offering restricted hours to the parish nor an OLM involved in local parochial ministry, then I was largely dismissed as 'difficult'.

The first lifeline was a CHRISM leaflet that appeared on a Course evening through which I discovered I was not alone. Others believed they were called to be a priest in their workplace – not as a means to be self-supporting, but as the actual place of their ministry. I was linked with a member who could help and guide me in drafting the Working Agreement with my future parish and received much personal support and encouragement. I resolved to attend the CHRISM RELECTIVE WEEKEND to be held in February at Holland House, Pershore, Worcs.

On arrival I was welcomed warmly. As conversations developed I shared the experience of the ugly duckling who found he was a swan! As the sessions progressed the concept of a MSE vocation clarified and I knew I had not made a mistake. We began by acknowledging the insecurities of working life and the precariousness of our position on the edges of church life. 'Living on the Edges' was the theme given to the Weekend. We divided into small groups to design a self-learning training pack suitable for introducing MSE to Anglican bishops and other church leaders. This encouraged focused sharing and we set about each task in the businesslike style of the secular workplace, forming a close-

knit team. The vision grew...

The programme was punctuated by worship that reflected the sessions, by delicious and plentiful feasting and fellowship in the comfortable hospitality of Holland House, by opportunity to relax and re-charge. We placed a symbol of our work before the altar in the chapel at a time of offering ourselves afresh to God and, before we parted, we each committed ourselves to another's shared prayer request over the next 12 months. I will always be grateful for this timely support and resolved to make CHRISM better known, especially amongst those training for ordained ministry.

The Precariousness of Work

Phil Aspinall

Insecurity is affecting the world of work from several directions. This article brings together the reflections from our weekend at Holland House in February 2001.

Jobs are under pressure. Despite national legislation many new jobs only offer low pay or unsocial hours. Those who are in paid work find they have to work increasingly long hours - we are expected to sign out of the Working Hours Directive. Increasingly people leave paid employment and drift towards self employed or agency work – this is true of professionals as well as manual workers. The expectations and scope of every job changes.

Information Technology changes ways of working – both the speed of transactions and activity, and dependency on the technology. IT has become a new enslavement.

“Unskilled” work / jobs are fewer and are usually in the public sector or service industries. But what do we mean by Unskilled – the work that in the days of large factories employed many people – but even the person pushing a pallet truck has a skill. Different skills are needed today

Many new jobs are in service related activities. Women employed more than men as many new types of job are no longer dependent on physical aspects which used to dictate which jobs were possible. Some are person based - Call centres, waiters, shop assistants. Others are non-personal jobs - Cleaning, Washing up, Shelf stacking (“Refurbishment Assistant”).

But the training and skills base is still vital Can you (you can) train anybody for anything. Recognising skills - discerning talents – takes us back to the idea of the body of Christ. Vocations – what does it mean to be called? Called but not equipped ? The place of peace (can we call it God) is where skills, vocation and work overlap.

Business always has had to change to grow and to develop - a business without investment will starve. There are threats of take over – or the current trend large organisations being broken done into smaller competitive bits. We encounter different perspectives on change in different sectors (Industry, health, teaching etc)but the same problems and issues

As the world becomes more interconnected, the “knock on” effect of decisions becomes less predictable. Everything increasingly has a Global impact. But in this world of Globalisation, who is in control – who makes the decisions? Globalisation may bring loss of jobs in one location, but it also stimulates opportunities for further service. New contexts demand new ways of being.

Even in national issues - whose agenda is driving the change (e.g. in Health and Education)...is it the media or the government. Is it still only the share price or has the concept of Stakeholders begun to take hold (for the benefit of everyone who is affected by the business)

The change from manufacturing to non- manufacturing base has been achieved by increased automation – on one hand automation is seen as dehumanising, but it has removed the need for inhuman

manual labour and conditions of the past (although these may be transferred elsewhere short term). New businesses grow from the people freed from manual labour. Manufacture is conducted as a global business; but Services are local – delivered to an individual in a place (Are call centres manufacturers? - services detached from the local context)

Businesses used to have a paternalistic concern for their employees, which was repaid in loyalty and a sense of community and belonging. The loss of paternalism leads to a loss of identity and the feeling of belonging that paternalism provided – paternalism provided support. In parallel with this loss of the corporate there has been a transfer of risks from the institution to the individuals. With this loss of the “corporate” has disappeared ways of working such as the. Unions collaboration with business.

Where then does the culture or ethos come from? Small is beautifulor is it, or does this lead to increased fragmentation ? The overarching value and purpose is missing to create meaning for both global and smaller units.

Change for change’s sake? Who initiates changes ? Change is popular with those who start it - “No one ever initiates change to their own disadvantage “.

Re-structuring has become a way of life – indeed it has become a mantra that continuous change is the only way of progress. Many take-overs are finance driven, but change is often seen as a matter of service – of responsiveness to the needs of others (customers). But where are the perceived needs of the customer created

Change can give the freedom and stimulation to new opportunities and new ways of working - Insecurity is not*necessarily* negative. We are told that there is a time for pruning and a time to stay our hand - when it would be a disaster. How is pruning to be done? – for more growth, generously, for the good of others or to show our skill with the shears (selfishly) !

All change needs to be managed but poor Management of change often lets organisations down. It can lead to conflict in the community and it needs handling differently for the internal and the external. Is it to be carried out through consultation or by finding scapegoats for previous poor performance.

How is success to be measured? It is by the product or service delivered or only by the profit generated. Is value only equated with money or are there other drivers - money is only an indicator, not an input control.

Change will always be with us. Changing demands lead to changing responses and hence to the organisations which deliver them. This in turn leads to changing work and job requirements, and so to an uncertain present and insecure future for the population.

Personal. Most people need enough to make ends meet – to pay for daily living. The fear and insecurity arise when the means of achieving this are threatened. Many live in fear of the future.

But it has become a truism so say that there are no longer careers for life.

But the shock of redundancy is about far more than this – it threatened the reason for existence (despite the talk that it is the job which is redundant not the individual). The work force and the individual feel that they have no control over the events surrounding them. To find new work may disrupt home and family life: “How far do I have to travel to find new work” – “Am I prepared to take a cut in pay or extended hours to stay in the same area”?

But it is equally true that we are breeding new individuals for whom change is the norm – moving on, changing job is seen as a means of progression. The entrepreneurial spirit of the 1980's has transformed our expectation of a job. There has been a move to individual responsibility and provision – the company or the

government no longer provides.

This independence is reflected in the way we work. We increasingly only deal with a person for a single topic transaction rather than working on a community of multiplex interactions. We deal with a client on a single call in a dislocated call centre, or act as a consultant or agency staff for a discreet piece of work. Relationships are reduced to the monoplex.

You are on your own, always having to sell yourself – to prove your worth and value. This self worth is only based on the output – there is little assessment of the quality of the process or the input we make. But the irony is that teams are important, and teamwork matters all the more for the time that we are part of them – being loved (team building) does produce output.

We remain part of the team, but only if you are coming up with the goods – however, if someone is not delivering or working as required, do we throw them out or train them in? We were reminded of the parables of vines: God loves us unless we don't bear fruit – then we are cast into the fire

When thinking of the individuals we need to remember that Managers are as important as workers – and share the same human needs and live with the same uncertainties. The centre is as important as the edge.

Precariousness is universal - everything contributes to uncertainty. We who are caught up in the currents of change can say and do lots of things locally in pastoral support and encouragement. But we are also called to engage with the global and the structural – to challenge and encourage change as a force to bring Kingdom values.

But it may be worth reflecting that the purpose of creation is not my, or even our, survival – it is the outworking of something bigger. To what extent can we as Christians so the Christian Hope

behind all this – the Good News. The gospel proclaims that - suffering and dying precede new life; pruning produces better fruit and more flowering; we live with insecurity and God lives in it too.

Insecurity at work stems from the measures used to attribute value which are not rooted in the Kingdom of God Stuff – the things that make people whole – but in Money and Politics. Those in power determine the measures and exert pressure to obtain the desired outcomes and may directly challenge or undermine the well being of the workforce – so they either leave or are forced out.....

Challenge Management to encourage teams to set input measures to improve performance. Affirm the bits that are going right – where God is already at work

The only certainty in the word of work is uncertainty. What we “know” is always insecure, but without insecurity there would be no change – and much change is positive. The positive effects of insecurity and change are disproportionate, on those least able to control their own destiny. The Gospel calls us to be prophetic to those who can mitigate its effects, and to stand with ALL those who are affected.

What can we do ?.....Be there !

As humans we share the fundamental precariousness of mortality. There is tension always between the positive and negative aspects of our insecurities. In work we share the cost of that tension. We strive with others to bring justice, enable people to flourish, and bring fuller life to the world.

The power of the right word

“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.” This is the stated purpose of CHRISM, and we try to do this daily, using the opportunities that present themselves to us.

“Seeing” the Christian story can be difficult enough. We do it with the eye of faith, supported by our training and our awareness of the ubiquity of God. “Telling” the story is another story (sorry!) Articulating it to ourselves may be possible – communicating it to others takes skill. We need to convey the message in ways our listeners understand. This brings us hard up against the conundrum of language.

The language used during training for ministry is usually highly specialised (as is the particular language of any profession.) Understanding and using the language is one of the marks of belonging to the group. It is relatively easy for a group of people who all know the jargon to communicate, but the outsider rapidly feels excluded. Clergy and theologians talk cheerfully about grace, sacraments, incarnation, accidie, atonement or penitence without turning a hair, but what would be the reaction of the guy in the next desk or the woman in the canteen queue if you used those terms in a conversation? (Come to think of it, what is the reaction of the person in the pew? How much of the jargon of liturgy and hermeneutics makes real sense to the average church-goer?)

Because the way we tell the story is so important, CHRISM will be looking particularly at language in its meetings this year. At the AGM on July 14th we hope to have an expert speaker on the subject, to balance the annual mysteries of minutes and accounts. Later in the year, at the Reflective Weekend (9th – 11th November) language will be the main theme. There will be opportunities for our own story-telling, and for exploring better ways to tell the Christian story.

Our secretary, Phil Aspinall, regularly reminds us that Jesus taught in stories, using the everyday language of ordinary people. “The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed...a vineyard...a master who had three servants...a poor woman who lost a penny.” What stories do we tell as we work? Can the Kingdom of God be like a busy surgery, a traffic jam, a trading

floor, or a nuclear power station? Come and join us at the AGM and in November, and find out!

Margaret Joachim

Looking to the Future

At our meeting in January, the Committee took time out to review the distinctive focus of CHRISM. We agreed there was a clear need for CHRISM alongside and complementing the organisations and institutions addressing issues of Faith and Work. Gaining this clarity helps us to focus on the significant things that CHRISM has to offer – and the things we have to do to keep us on track.

- CHRISM's distinct focus is on theologising about the things we do in our work. We talk about vocation and choosing to accept a call to be in secular work.
- We should rejoice in the many “faith & work” groups and the courses and debate they engender. Some focus on “behaving in a Christian way” in the workplace; others contribute theology.
- We could postulate a distinction - faith is what we take in; “ministry” (key to our title) is about being there.
“Ministry” = doing + being.
- Correspondence suggests many people see our value in “supporting ministry in work” (acknowledging a distinction between “in” and “at” work).
- This ministry involves celebrating (and doing it explicitly); forgiving (and declaring forgiveness), proclaiming and pointing to the Kingdom / Good News in the real world (“the mess”) – it is not aimed at getting people into Church.
- CHRISM uniquely provides a network for those in lay or ordained secular ministry and those, lay and ordained, who want to focus on the MSE way of understanding their ministry

What does CHRISM provide ?

- The Journal (approx. 100 to members, 150 free)

- Other CHRISM Publications (working on “MSE and Retirement”)
- Conferences and weekends – with new members always arriving and a core group of attendees to form a base
- Promoting MSE to the churches (always has been done – now becoming more formalised)

How do we resource these? - could we reduce committee meetings ?

- Would CHRISM be needed if there were good local support networks ?
- We need to focus on providing a service for our members and others working to foster and develop MSE

We noted key issues:

- 60 % of copies of The Journal go out free.
- We can look at economies on where we spend our money – but we need to continue to build and expand the high profile we, and MSE, are now receiving.
- We need to look for ways of building income, acknowledging that the target market of practising MSEs is finite.
- There are several current opportunities now, such as the interest in Worker Priests and the training module for Anglican Bishops

The Committee would welcome comments and suggestions, and any offers of help to work with us in taking forward our vision.

Phil Aspinall

MSF publishes Guidance for MSE

The clergy section of the MSF union has published advice on the Occasional Offices for Non Stipendiary and Retired Clergy. This represents an interesting development in MSF over the last 5 years. The spokesman for MSF in 1996, noting a trend in the church “to think in terms of using more non stipendiary clergy”, concluded “I suspect this will result in a reduced quality of clergy

being available to the parishes”. This present recognition by MSF of the role of NSMs in the Occasional Offices suggests a change from their previous view that “non stipendiary clergy are not generally available”. There was, not surprisingly, subsequent correspondence in *The Times* !

In February 1999 the Anglican House of Bishops issued a set of guidelines intended to regulate the payment of fees to ministers (including Readers) who are not stipendiary clergy. MSF’s chief concern is the regulations which say that where a fee is received in respect of the Occasional Offices, no part of it should be retained by licensed NSMs (if not in their job description) and Readers, and the retired clergy should surrender one third.

MSF has obtained opinion of Counsel and concluded that the House of Bishops’ Guidelines are no more than a voluntary code which have no legal standing. Counsel also considered the rights of NSMs in respect of ministry at the Occasional Offices.

Fees for Occasional Offices are, strictly, payable to the Incumbent (or the Diocesan Board of Finance during an interregnum) and the Incumbents stipend is adjusted accordingly. However, MSF report that it has been the practice for licensed NSMs or retired clergy with PTO, to retain the fee in return for the time and labour involved.

MSF advise NSMs to require a job description permitting them to receive fees, and to use this to ensure fees are paid. Where not included in a job description, MSF advise that NSMs should issue an invoice for the full amount of the fees, and that this arrangement is agreed with the incumbent (or DBF) before taking the service. This invoice should be directed to the person requesting the NSMs ministry at the service, although they note that once the principle is established, it may be sufficient just to keep a written record of fees received.

MSF recommend that other clergy “for example clergy who are in secular employment” should follow these same principles. For

more information, or a copy of the MSF Advice, I suggest contacting MSF through: The Revd. WF Ward, 1 Denholm Gardens, Letham, Forfar, Angus DO8 2XT.

Phil Aspinnall (a member of MSF)

Book review

“The Tentmaking Pastor: The joy of Bivocational Ministry”, Dennis W. Bickers; Baker Books, 2000, ISBN 0-8010-9099-7; 136 pages; £9.99.

Of Baptist churches in the USA, 73% are pastored by bivocational ministers (BMs). Most are small, but some supported by teams of BMs, and there is a growing trend to mixed ministerial teams of paid and bivocational ministers. “Bivocational” corresponds more closely to “Non-Stipendiary” than it does to MSE. The principle concerns in the book are with the self-supporting minister as the pastor of a local church; its strengths lie in that. MSE as such is covered in a page. On balance though, this is a useful addition to the *corpus*, especially as it is deeply rooted in experience.

After 18 years as pastor of Hebron Baptist Church, Madison, Indiana, Dennis Bickers decided it was time to share his experiences more widely than the Southern Baptist Bivocational Ministers network. It was worth it. For most of this time Dennis worked at a Cummins engine factory about 50 miles north of his home, and for his first seven years of ministry combined working the late shift with study (mornings) at a theological seminary 50 miles south. One of the strengths of his book is the practical advice on time and resource management!

The first two chapters demonstrate how this kind of ministry is both real and needed, in terms familiar to the UK reader. As Dennis puts it: “Those denominations whose policies do not welcome and affirm bivocational ministers will be sending these individuals, and the churches who called them, a message that their

ministry is second-rate at best”. The third chapter examines the problem areas: practical, such as denominational meetings, funerals and so on, personal – jealousy from stipendiary ministers, identity - and professional. “Bivocational ministers need to make sure they do not view their ministry as a godly calling and their second job as merely a means to paying the bills.”

The following chapters look at preparation for ministry and its rewards, then chapter six examines the importance of keeping a balance. The order of priorities Dennis gives is revealing: God – family – church – work – self; it invites comparison, so mine would be: God – family – work – church – self. Chapters seven to nine look at the importance of preaching, and considering the call to bivocational ministry made to the individual and to the church.

For the non-stipendiary minister focussed on the local church this is a “must read”. It is well presented, carefully considered, oozing with personal experience and commitment. For the MSE it is certainly a “good read”, and touches on many familiar areas and experiences. As Dennis himself puts it: “A [stipendiary] pastor may have little idea of how difficult it can be to be a positive Christian witness while working on an assembly line with a group of people who do not hold to Christian values.” The bivocational minister – whatever their title - can. *Rob Fox*

Gift Aid and Chrism.

Are you a UK tax payer? Then read on.....

Most of us will have been inundated with requests during the last year from charities asking for further support through the scheme of Gift Aid, which Parliament introduced from 6.4.00. Effectively this replaces the scheme of giving to charities through covenants. Of course if your giving is by CAF card, or voucher, then you cannot also use Gift Aid, even if you are a top rate taxpayer!

So what has this got to do with Chrism? The big change is actually that the Inland Revenue's rules for Gift Aid are quite different than they were for covenanted giving. The new rules seem to have been designed to help charities raise additional funds, not least the smallest ones, such as ourselves. It is now quite legitimate for Chrism to claim Gift Aid support for all subscriptions, as well as other general donations, received since 1.4.00, provided "donors" complete a Gift Aid form. Better still, we can put in a claim retrospectively! However, I would not like to miss this window of opportunity which exists only until the Treasury decides that no more retrospective claims can be accepted!

If you are a U.K. taxpayer would you please complete the enclosed **Gift Aid form** and return it to me? My address is on the cover of the Journal. So far I have received 13 forms from members, so there must be a very large number to come in! If you have any questions please contact me, but I cannot give advice on tax, personal or otherwise! Please complete the form now! Your help could raise several hundred pounds each year and make a big difference to our financial health!

Keith Holt Hon. Treasurer.

Foot and Mouth

*The following, topical, article comes from the newly acquired PC of **Jim Cummins**, whose talents include being a farmer in the border country of Wales and England, in Herefordshire. Few of us "townies" have a real appreciation of the impact of foot and mouth disease on rural communities. Jim's thoughtful reflections bring home both the reality and the theology.*

Some extracts from my diary - February 2001:

21st: [A footnote.] An outbreak of foot and mouth disease has been reported from an abattoir near Braintree in Essex. It takes us back immediately to 1967/8 and we await future reports with some trepidation.

25th; F & M is headline news and deeply worrying following the announcement of another outbreak in Devon – multiple holdings and high turnover. So now it's SE, NE, SW....

26th; F & M now in Wilts. (very near to daughter and family) and in Herefordshire near the Monmouth border. Seems it will be very difficult to contain – a number of big farmers and dealers with large numbers of livestock constantly moving nationwide and beyond.

27th; The threat of F & M has a throttling effect on everything. Everyone is becoming an island, cut off and deliberately isolating with barriers, straw pads soaked in disinfectant etc. in what is probably a pointless exercise to try and prevent the invasion by an airborne, bird borne, and weather borne virus. The fold gate is closed. E's car is parked down the lane, where we've also fixed a post box and left the milk crate etc. so nothing needs to come on to the farm and anyone who goes through the gate, inc. us of course, has to immerse feet, [wellies or shoes,] in a disinfectant bath. 5 Tonnes of cake [animal feed] arrived early a.m. Most impressed by driver's precautions. I saw the lorry pass the end of the lane and then reverse back and stop. Thinking he must be a new driver I went down there to see what was up. It was the usual driver but he was out there with a sprayer, disinfecting wheels, arches, footplate etc. "I thought I'd back up" he said "then I can blow it in without coming into the yard and go straight off again." That's caring service – and he stopped again to disinfect before getting back onto the road.

A phone call late this evening from a friend who reports for Shropshire Radio. "We've heard there's an outbreak at Felindre – do you know where it is?" I said I hadn't heard anything but there are several Felindres'; perhaps it was a different one.

28th; It wasn't. It had struck friends of ours at The Waen. So now we are in an "infected area". Phoned County Council to ask if they would send warning notices about footpath closures etc.

Within half an hour they had been e-mailed to us.

Phyllis 'phoned to ask if she ought not to come. [Phyllis came to work here in 1937 and has been part of the establishment ever since] So she comes, leaves her car down the lane, dips her feet and crosses the barrier. It's a double barrier now because some stray sheep have been trying to join ours so they can get some food.

That's another problem. We find that those sheep come from some way down the road – out on rented 'winter grazing'. They belong to a farmer who comes from Felindre, next door to the Waen – the holding where the case no.35 was found. He has very large numbers of sheep parked all over the place but because of his proximity to The Waen he is barred from going out to feed them. Arrangements are made for a neighbour of ours to throw some hay over the fence but they prefer to break out and help themselves.

Perhaps that gives some idea of the way things are. We have put off the visitors who usually come to help us with 'the lambing' – a spell of 6 or 8 weeks of broken nights and frayed tempers, of bottles and medicine, of getting them alive and keeping them alive. Oh yes; and digging graves for those that beat us. And we are ever hopeful that no *outside* influence will come along to spoil it all. I give thanks every day that my partners at the Garage/Shop in Clun decided to retire last year when they got to "pension age", so we sold the business and I don't have to commute over the hill every day as I have for the past 18 years.

So far there has been only one further outbreak up this valley – another farm adjacent to those poor folk at the Waen. In one sense they were lucky though it can't be of much comfort. The infection was traced from Welshpool market. It was in the early days, before everything got out of hand. All their cattle and sheep were slaughtered as soon as the disease was discovered, and incinerated the next day.

For the past three weeks, especially in Cumbria where the greatest numbers are found, the handling of the epidemic has been chaotic. There have been delays before infected animals are killed allowing the further spread of the disease. Far worse – and almost unimaginable for the owners of the animals – is the delay after slaughter. It is hard to imagine the horror of living with the stench and surrounded by the bloated carcasses that represent your livelihood as well as having been your friends. Our own situation, outlined above by those diary entries, shows just how insignificant are our problems when set alongside the “hot spots”. Even so, for those in restricted areas such as ours, who cannot sell anything because it can’t be moved off farm and, if they are already deeply in debt as many are, they have no money coming in to buy food for their animals – so their problems are compounded. Catch 22.

I don’t want to dwell on the mishandling – it is too easy to criticise from the outside; but the justifiable anger of many of those caught up and being driven to distraction must be realised. When we found that senior civil servants attended a conference in Japan last June to discuss this new and extra virulent strain of F & M sweeping westwards, we wonder why we were not told. Why did they remain silent? When it becomes apparent (though not yet admitted) that the disease was already active in sheep flocks in this country as early as January or even December last year, it is hardly surprising if the spectre of ‘political expediency’ crosses our minds. Has nothing been learned from the attempts to hide the BSE crisis in the hope that it would go away? It seems clear that the report on the 1967/8 epidemic has been ignored. Do not burn – infection can be spread that way – carcasses should be buried in quicklime. “Of course”, it can be argued, “that was 30 years ago. Times have changed and....” Fine say I, so why not make use of the most up-to-date technology and use vaccination? That *has* changed since 1967 but the powers will go on debating its virtue until it is too late.

One ecclesiastical spin-off derives from all this stress within the

farming community. A number of country clergy who may well wonder what they are for in this 21st century, suddenly find that they have a role. The 'phones are ringing. Doctors, clergy, bank managers, as well as Samaritans and the Rural Stress networks are being called on for help, support and a shoulder to lean or weep on.

That brings me back home and to a question I was asking myself last year. Throughout my years at "Clunside" I had no problem recognising where my ministry lay. It was within the working relationship with my customers, suppliers and colleagues. Then, when it was sold and I became, at last, a full time farmer, what, I wonder, has become of 'ministry'? Since the outbreak of F&M I become more aware of the importance of 'being there and being unimportant'. I can see that, however painful this crisis is, it does not compare (as The Guardian suggested a week or two ago) with the "Black Death". It is not going to knock out 50% of the population of Europe. On the other hand I would not wish to underestimate the depth of despair generated. I rewrote the Book of Job some years ago when the BSE crisis was spreading throughout the country. Now, as Easter approaches I am preparing for that great celebration. I reflect on Abraham offering his son as a sacrifice but finds a tup caught in a briar patch and prays a sigh of relief as he uses that instead. Moses tells the Israelites to slay a lamb so the hand of God will pass them by and then, as St. Paul says, instead of a lamb, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us..." for "he is the true paschal lamb which was offered for us..." So we pray "O lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us; grant us your peace". And, as if to confuse us, may "the God of Peace, who brought again that great *shepherd* of the sheep, make you perfect..." It'll take a lifetime to work your way through just that – surely.

In the meantime I can promise you that from within our self imposed isolation the greatest and most uplifting element that has come our way has been the constant flow of 'phone calls, cards, letters and e-mails that friends have sent – not least from fellow

MSEs. So if you know of other farmers who have livestock under threat, don't hesitate to be in touch – I am confident it will be appreciated.

Best Wishes.

Many readers will have noticed on the inside cover of the Journal that we have a “Moderator Emeritus”, Michael Ranken. Among the many things for which Michael is emeritus is that he was producing a “Newsletter among Ministers-at-Work” long before Chrism was formed ! More recently he designed and built our Website!

It is with concern, yet lifted by hope, that we report that Michael had a heart attack, and a mild stroke, on Saturday March 10th. He is recovering well. We have sent messages of encouragement from all connected with Chrism, but it would be good if Michael, his wife Barbara, and their family can be in the prayers of their many Chrism friends at this time. Congratulations too on their 50th wedding anniversary at the end of March.

Events & Diary dates

- **CPAS “You and Ministry” days**
In common with most other organizations promoting Christian ministry, CPAS tend to concentrate on the local church. They have however produced useful information sheets on Non-Stipendiary Ministry and Ministry in Secular Employment. These can be obtained from CPAS, Athena Drive, Tachbrook Park, Warwick, CV34 6NG. The CPAS web site is on www.cpas.org.uk. Several “You and Ministry” events are being run during the year. The day events are on: 16 June at Leeds, 30 June at Cambridge, 24 November at Warwick.
- The **German Worker Priests** are meeting in Frankfurt, 19-21 October. Details from Phil Aspinall.

- In the USA the **Presbyterian Tentmakers** hold their annual meeting in Houston, 26-28 October. Again, details from Phil Aspinall.
- The **Ridley Hall Foundation** are running a series of conferences on the following themes:
 23-25 May: “Business and sustainable development”
 22-24 June: “Spirituality and the Workplace”
 Further details can be obtained by contacting RHF on 01223 741074.
- [Faith@Work: Being a Christian Monday to Friday](#) is the title of a weekend of “teaching on work and faith issues at St. Martin’s Church, Cambridge [I remember it well! Ed.] on 9 – 10 June. Richard Higginson is among the speakers. Information from Mike Beasley, 01223 415924, e-mail: mdrb@bcs.org.uk.
- **Peacemaking for Churches**
 November 2-4 2001
 An introductory workshop for all who seek to resolve conflict in a church context. A practical workshop which will include teaching and discussion as well as the opportunity to learn and practice the basic skills of mediation.
 Tutor: Rev'd Geoff Jaques
 12 places
 At Rydal Hall, Ambleside, Cumbria (residential)
 Further details, including costs and bookings please contact the Warden, David Simon.
 Tel: +44(0)15394 32050, Fax: +44(0) 15394 34887
 E-mail: Bookings@rydalhall.org
- The **People and Work Programme**, Peterborough Diocese, has just re-issued its programme “*Work and Worship*”. It includes practical ideas on bringing work into worship. It

can be obtained from: Diocese of Peterborough, Bouverie Court, The Lakes, Bedford Road, Northampton, NN4 7YD; 01604 887000.

- **“Faith on Monday”** is a 3 session study course for use with groups exploring some basic faith at work issues, written by past CHRISM Moderator Ruth Stables. £5 for a pack of 10 plus Leaders Notes, from CARIS, Shallowford House, Stone, Staffordshire, ST15 0NZ; 01785 761763.

And not forgetting

The 2001 CHRISM AGM and Conference, 14 July, starting 11am, at Carr’s Lane URC Church, Birmingham.

See enclosed flyer and booking form.

Contributions to “Ministers-at-Work” are always welcome: reflections, news, events, reviews, and reports.

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*Our faith imposes on us a right and a duty to throw ourselves
into the things of the earth*

Teilhard de Chardin