

Ministers-at-Work

The Journal for Christians

in secular ministry

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.

CHRISM

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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

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/>
 And **LinkedIn**, at:
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3756477>

Editorial

An Editor's life is one of calm and storms. For most of the period between editions there is gentle calm, with the occasional ripple from gathering useful information and nudging contributors for promised articles. This followed by the two week storm of actually putting the next edition together – relentlessly pursuing the writers who promised much but have not yet delivered, checking information, proof-reading, and putting the contents in the most logical order. Hard work - but when the finished article finally takes shape really rewarding. So a huge thanks to all who have sent me material for this quarter's journal, which is looking particularly good.

The Reflective weekend is an obvious starting point, and we had a lovely time in Glastonbury, as you'll read. Looking a little further back I've managed to persuade Phil Aspinall that his sermon from the Sunday of last year's Conference is worthy of a wider audience (and it is).

Back in 2000 I took over for my first stint as Editor from Dorie Johnson, who has always been thought-provoking and incisive, so it is with great pleasure that included is a series of questions Dorrie poses to CHRISM and our members. Please do think about these and bombard me with responses.

They lead neatly into the first of our series of **thematic approaches** to editions, not that all the contents will follow the theme, but over this and subsequent editions we will have articles on 'Exploitation' (Stan Frost and Phil Aspinall), then 'Starting' in July (starting work, a new job, in a new home / location, retirement ...), 'International' as the theme in October, 'Doing' in January, 2017, 'Parables' in April and 'Ending' in July. If you can contribute and article to any of these themes, please let me know.

The articles on Exploitation resonate a great deal with me as I regularly encounter the HMRC end of actions on Modern Day Slavery and the National Minimum (now Living) Wage in my work. It is revealing to see how businesses' approach to recruitment and due diligence vary; plenty of good practice but also poor.

I'm very pleased to be able to reproduce two articles that I'm sure readers will appreciate. The first is Hugh Valentine's address to the successful SSM day in Oxford diocese last October. It is at the same time challenging and inspiring; I've already read it three times, finding more each time. The second is the first of a pair on the misunderstanding and misuse of spiritual formation, by a trans-Atlantic colleague, Frederick Schmidt, which complements Hugh's comments admirably. As readers will know, spiritual formation forms a key part of ministerial training. Or to put it another way – a great deal of time and effort is expended pushing budding ministers into a pre-ordained box. This is also highlighted in "Swimming with the Fishes", and excellent MSE autobiography from Michael Johnson; I thoroughly enjoyed it. Time to think outside the box ...

There are the usual sections on Events and Resources. The most important of the former is of course the CHRISM Conference and AGM, on 15-17 July at Foxhill, Frodsham, Cheshire. Unlike many more recent North West Ordinands, I never went to Foxhill for a residential weekend, but know the area quite well. Frodsham is near the top of a sandstone outcrop, an ancient sea cliff, overlooking the inner Mersey estuary, with lovely views, including over the old ICI works at Runcorn, the oil refineries at Stanlow, and the sludge beds where dredgings from the Manchester Ship canal were dumped (I saw my first Peregrine Falcon and Red-breasted Flycatcher there). Actually, it's beautiful; come and see!

As our indefatigable Secretary observes in the AGM Notice (page 39), we will be electing for various posts on the Committee. CHRISM always welcomes new faces and asks members to think about nominating themselves. People can always contact a member of the existing committee or an officer for a chat about what is involved, to help them decide. As a guide, we normally hold 4 (Saturday) meetings during the year, presently in Birmingham (we always look for the most convenient location for where the members travel from).

And finally here, congratulations to Jean Skinner on being elevated to the dizzy heights of Canon. Richly deserved!

Rob Fox

CHRISM Reflective weekend

"Offered for Sale. Well-appointed Gentleman's residence. Extensive stables. Interesting ruins in the grounds." So might an estate agent have advertised Abbey House when it was newly built in the 1830s. It proved to be an excellent and popular venue for the 2016 Reflective weekend, with good grub, a quiet location yet very close to the town centre and delightful staff. And the ruins? The Abbey of course, and very fine they are too.



Sue Henderson, a URC Minister from Trowbridge, led us through 6 sessions as we explored 'Living Water':

- 'I'm parched'
- 'Meeting God in the Desert'
- 'Rivers in the Desert'
- 'Living Water'
- 'Life-Giving Stream'
- 'The Water of Life'

The balance was well-received, not over-doing the input and with plenty of time to explore, either in quiet reflection or scampering up

the Tor. As we passed vendors selling (New Age) trinkets it was easy to imagine how the same selling to pilgrims was probably under way 700 years ago.



The town of Glastonbury is a delight too - hardly a shutter in site on the high street and nearly all the 'local' shops sadly disappeared from many of our towns and cities. The parish church (St John's) is also worth a visit, not least for the giant egg-timer on the pulpit ... (<http://www.stjohns-glastonbury.org.uk/>).

Reflections

Margaret Trivasse

CHRISM Reflective Weekends are great opportunities to step out of the everyday routine and have the imagination stimulated. And where better than the wonderful, wacky and beautiful place that is Glastonbury? Revd Sue Henderson led us through a series of meditations which started in the desert, led to the encounter with God there, and gradually moved towards being refreshed by living water, which would then bubble over to others. The amount of space Sue left gave ample time for free association and creative engagement.

The desert is an excellent blank canvas for streams of consciousness. Immediately came to my mind the 1970s hit single which includes the words, "I've been through the desert on a horse with no name / It felt good to be out of the rain / In the desert you can remember your name / 'Cause there ain't no one for to give you no pain".

Unscrambling the grammar of the lyric points to a desert where there is space to regain a sense of identity, and a freedom from distress. (And even in this pop song, the desert eventually becomes an ocean!)

But more frequently, the desert is a disorientating, dangerous place. The Desert Fathers and Mothers went out to face the powers of evil and combat them. Jesus was tested in the desert ahead of his ministry, and although both Mark and Matthew have angels waiting on him at the end of his trial, Luke leaves Jesus alone. Many generations earlier, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, lacking direction and lacking water. I thought of the thousands of refugees in transit from war zones to Europe, in danger of perishing in the Sahara, or the Mediterranean, or wandering desperately from closed border to security fence. A desert can be a place of rocks and biting wind just as much as sand and burning heat.

Somehow, somewhere, in this desert is God. Stripped bare of the clutter of daily life, there is the opportunity to be open to God. The mysterious, elusive God meets us in unexpected places and ways. God is sustaining us even when we are unaware of it. Sue encouraged us to think of the river of our lives: times when it has flowed easily and calmly, times when it has been forced underground or gushed through narrow crevices. We were led to meditate on the gift of living water, to allow ourselves to be filled up with it, and ultimately for it to overflow.

Sue led us in some guided meditations of the kind I'm familiar with from counselling training but have not always found helpful (previously I've usually nodded off before the climax when a wise person gives a gift!). This time, however, I was met by my beloved deceased godmother, who gave me a pebble flecked with gold. It was an image which made sense in relation to my life now.

We also had the opportunity to use art materials provided by Sue. Not being able to draw anything which resembles what I see in my imagination, I welcome the recent trend for adult colouring designs. Sue brought some beautiful outlines of Celtic designs and labyrinths. Colouring in the labyrinth helped me reflect creatively on the complexity and challenges of my working life as well as its beauty. I will take away the idea that it is okay to be in the desert: it is a place which holds surprises and hidden possibilities.

All these reflections, set in the lovely grounds of the House overlooking the Abbey, and a walk up the Tor, together with meeting old friends and new, and excellent food, made for a memorable weekend. Many thanks to all who organized and who supported the event.



Ruth Brothwell

The CHRISM Reflective Weekend comes around each year as a welcome oasis after all the Christmas hype. I needed a break. I needed a spiritual break. My work contract had come to an end and at this time I no longer had a job. I was struggling to understand how my ministry as an MSE could be worked out into the future. I knew the theme was to be 'Living Waters'. I did not feel exactly 'dry' yet life was a bit of a desert so hopefully this would be a time of refreshment at very least.

I was not disappointed. As soon as I walked into our sitting room at Abbey House I sensed that our speaker, Sue was a visual person, like me and I was going to enjoy myself. In the centre of the floor lay an artistic portrayal of a desert in sand coloured fabric. We heard and reflected on the vision before us of sand and dryness but the single candle burned to remind us of the constant presence of God in our midst. In each session, the picture changed. Blue, watery fabric appeared and increased as we continued to consider the Living Waters, until on Sunday the blue waters flowed from the altar.

Sessions with Sue were short enabling us to spend lots of time with our own prayers and the array of crafty condiments arranged for our use and delectation. It was great to simply sit. Sit in the window bay looking out over the Abbey ruins and colour in a picture. How seldom we have such space in our lives to do this. To stop; and stand; and stare. To allow the voice of God to speak to our hearts instead of being so constantly busy with life, mission and of course the work of God which we know how to do so much better than He does!

CHRISM weekends mean renewed acquaintances, meeting up with old friends, catching up with stories, refreshing our MSE. The 'pagan' shops along the High Street, pushed their therapies, their books on dreams, their charms and crystals but only reinforced people's search for something outside themselves to make sense of life. They should come up to Abbey House!

Walk to Emmaus

It was a pleasure to be joined on the weekend by **Peter Richardson**, Europe Regional Leader for Walk to Emmaus. The Walk to Emmaus is a 3 day journey through scripture with the intention of revealing more of Christ in your life and His plans for you. Its aim is to also help equip disciples for carrying out those plans and be His hands and feet in the world.

Using the story of the 2 on the road to Emmaus from Luke's gospel, the 3 day journey will reveal Christ through the use of 15 talks, communion and sharing meals together, just as in the story. The

walk is designed for those who already have a healthy church life of any denomination, but may feel under used or maybe need to reflect on where their gifts and talents can be of better use.

Each weekend usually begins on a Thursday evening and finishes early Sunday evening, although some weekends run over a bank holiday beginning Friday and ending Monday.

Find out more at: <http://www.emmaus-walk.org.uk/>

The ABC of MSE
A Sermon for the CHRISM Conference 2015

Phil Aspinall

I take the view that, whenever asked to take a service about MSE, we should always use the reading set in the lectionary rather than pick and choose something "more appropriate". This is because I believe that if every passage does not have something to inform what we are doing as MSE, we might as well give up. So the readings set for today, the Sunday of the CHRISM summer conference, are Ephesians 3 vv 14-21 and John 6 vv 1 – 21, and I take as a text: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory.... " (Eph. 3 v 20).

But our theme for the weekend is the ABC of MSE – Absolution, Blessing and Celebration. So again I take the view that, if this is a useful model, that will work for us every day in all our working situations, then it should be applicable to the narrative that we have before us today: the feeding of the 5,000. So I ask you: where do we see Absolution, Blessing and Celebration happening here, in this event – the feeding of the 5,000?

The assembled group was stunned into silence (which was quite a surprise given the amount of talking there had been over the weekend!) by this simple question. Try doing this with your community before you read on! One reason for the silence was that people are not used to being asked questions – they expect the

preacher to do all the work and talk at them – but slowly responses began to emerge...

So where do we see **absolution** – the assurance of sins forgiven? The boy had to forgive the people who took his lunch. Jesus, we are told, had gone away to escape the crowd, but then they follow him! Thousands of them! He has to forgive them for their folly and persistence. Perhaps the people needed forgiveness for setting out without any food for the day. And of course, maybe there was need for forgiveness, for all that waste.

And what about **blessing**? Some of the responses included the obvious blessing of the loaves and the fish by Jesus, but also the blessing to the people sitting on the grass in receiving food and sustenance. And maybe the boy felt blessed that his small gift of food was able to feed so many.

That leads us to **celebration**. 5,000 people eating a meal together must have been quite a party. And even if we believe that the power of the event lies in the way many of those present simply produced what food they had with them and shared it with those around them - then this too is a great cause for celebration. There is the simple joy of a meal shared with others – too often we eat alone.

So – from a stunned silence, we generated many interesting and creative ideas. But there is a more profound principle at work here - we are all so used to being talked at in church. So what happens if we (as Ministers) actually stop talking and ask people what they think? Try this sometime also!

In the vulnerable state in which I have found myself in recent weeks I have realised that people in general, and clergy in particular, divide into two categories: those who stop and just listen, and those who fill my space with helpful advice. You know how much I despair of people who just talk at me (but who am I to complain when here am I with a sermon slot standing here doing the talking at you!)

One of my favourite characters in the bible story is John the Baptist. From the glimpses we have of him he seems always to be saying: it's not about me – it's about him! We had a similar example in the

picture we used to help us in thinking about celebration – the image of Jesus at table at the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He does not talk about himself – but about the writings which spoke of what had been going on.

I was going to send an “And Finally” for the last edition of the Journal. So much of it was about “Min Div” (for a start, a totally Anglican and non-inclusive term) and about “how the church treats us” – it all seemed so self-centred and about us. Now, we do, indeed, need to help all the churches to create the space, the roles and the titles which enable MSE to flourish. But the danger is that we become so self-obsessed that we burn ourselves out.

By contrast, the other significant thing the last Journal spoke about was the European Worker Priests. I always just stand in awe of these people who say, simply, “we will go wherever it is needed to follow Jesus and to demonstrate the values of the gospel” – and often that means going alongside the poorest, the least well paid and most precarious in society and in the world. “It’s not about me it’s about him or her”.

And so to return to the theme of the weekend: ABC. When I saw the flyer for the weekend I was appalled: “how do we assure people?” it read. How self-centred is that! “It’s not about me it’s about them”. So, when we look at the places where we find ourselves, I would suggest that it is not about where we do the absolving, but where do we see absolution – people receiving assurance that their failures have been forgiven.

In the same way, it is not about where we do the blessing, but where we see blessing – where people are being affirmed; where the grace of God is acting through people in the situations around us.

And again, it is not about where we celebrate, with us as the centre of attention (oh, but it is such a tempting lure !) but where we see celebration – recognising those who are the cheer leaders where we work.

And so we come back to our text: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we

can ask or imagine, to him be glory.... ". May God give us the grace to be the enablers of all those around us, and of the A,B,C in all the good things that happen between them.

Questions for CHRISM

Dorrie Johnson

As I draft this edition of MaW, the news is dominated by the leaks from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca and tax avoidance. Dorrie's questions are therefore particularly relevant in the light of this and the following articles on Modern Day Slavery. Ed.

1. Assuming (for arguments sake) that power now lies with multinationals rather than with governments, are any CHRISM members engaging theologically with this?
2. What is the principle national concern for CHRISM?
3. Is CHRISM engaged with the question of how economic systems work today?
4. Do we feed the self-interests of the wealthy and the powerful?

All responses and thoughts welcome! To start the ball rolling, in answer to Q.1 – yes, daily in my work, and I'll expand on that in the next edition. Ed.

Chesterfield Modern Slavery Conference - 'Tackling Modern Slavery Together'

Stan Frost

This was the conference held by Derby Diocese on 5th December 2015 at the St Barnabas Centre in Danesmoor, a good and popular venue. Well over a hundred people attended who were welcomed by Rt Rev Alastair Redfern the Lord Bishop of Derby. The speakers provided information and explained how networks of organisations can work together to share information so that overall public awareness can work to prevent modern slavery.

Much of the information was new to many of the participants. Detective Inspector Harry Dick of the Organised Crime Unit of Derbyshire Police advised that there might be hundreds of people being held as slaves in Derbyshire alone. He has researched Home Office data. He emphasised that local people should be aware that the food they eat, the clothes they wear and the presents they might be giving for Christmas might well be provided through supply chains using people in slave conditions.

Currently there is concern about the chocolate being used for Easter Eggs, as chocolate from cocoa producers in West Africa (Ivory Coast in particular) using work forces which include children as young as 8 who work for very little return in difficult conditions. Fair Trade companies use chocolate produced without exploitation.

Mrs Cheryl Pigeon of Unite the Union told of the working conditions in a local warehouse belonging to Sport Direct, governed by a very strict regime which restricts the freedom of the workers - such that the Managing Director has subsequently been ordered to submit to an investigation by a parliamentary sub-committee. This situation seems to be ongoing as I write in March '16.

David Kennedy of Stop the Traffik (an organisation based in London) gave information on the scale of what is happening across the country. The web site describes the situation in the Philippines where the long standing touristic sex trade continues to involve younger participants who are seduced into the business through various devices and false offers of modelling careers.

Rachel Mullan-Feroze spoke of the work being done by the Ashiana Refuge in Sheffield which gives help, advice and support to those of the black Asian and minority communities who are in forced marriages and other situations where they might be abused or their freedom is restricted. (The organisations mentioned each have websites where more information can be obtained).

The Conference closed with questions and discussion which revealed that many attending were going away with a clearer idea of what is happening around us. The topic is being considered at the Pentecost

meeting of the European Worker Priests in Belgium this year which gives opportunity to make comparisons between the different countries represented. There seems to be little which individuals can do to prevent examples of exploitation partly because we claim not to know or notice what is being done or not done!

During my several visits to India I have observed situations which were personally upsetting but if you are a guest in houses where these things happen you can do little other than aim to say something pertinent which might encourage a different way of doing things without causing offence. Such comments were sometimes met with a smile and the information that those involved would be without a job if they weren't doing what they were doing.

Exploitation in the Garment Industry

Phil Aspinall

I was introduced to *Labour Behind the Label* by the late Keith Holt, a founding member and trustee of CHRISM and for many years our Treasurer. It was one of his several voluntary involvements. *Labour Behind the Label* campaigns to improve conditions and empower workers in the global garment industry. It champions garment workers' rights worldwide, supporting their efforts to improve their working conditions and change the fashion industry for the better. It raises awareness, provides information and promotes international solidarity between workers and consumers. It represents the Clean Clothes Campaign in the UK.

Labour Behind the Label was involved with the global 'Play Fair at the Olympics' initiative in 2004, which brought together trade unions and campaign groups to call for greater action from the Olympic movement and the sportswear industry on workers' rights. It carries out research and produces reports, on its own or in conjunction with other organisations (e.g. War on Want), such as:

- *Fashion Victims: The True Cost of Cheap Clothes at Primark, Asda and Tesco* (2006)

- *Let's Clean Up Fashion* (2007), revealed that workers making clothes for British high street stores receive around half of the money they need to live a decent life.
- *Asia Floor Wage* (2009) calculated a wage it says should be used as a minimum for workers in Asia, enough to pay for food, water, clothing, housing, taxes, utilities, healthcare and education.
- *Taking Liberties: the Story Behind the UK High Street* (2010) describes "how Marks & Spencer, Next, Monsoon, Debenhams, Dorothy Perkins and Miss Selfridge" ... "use Indian sweatshops which pay poverty wages and break labour laws to keep costs to a bare minimum."
- *Killer Jeans* (2011) about companies such as Asda, Diesel, Matalan and Primark selling jeans made using sandblasting to give denim a worn look, and how silica dust from the sand can get into workers' lungs, causing silicosis.

Here are a couple of examples of their more recent campaigns:

Handbag brand Mulberry slammed for worker exploitation at Turkish factory.

Turkish workers and activists globally launched a series of protests against handbag brand Mulberry for failing to protect the rights of workers in its Izmir supplier factory. More than 15 store actions were planned across Europe and the US last September, including handing in a petition at their Somerset HQ.

The brand has been criticised for refusing to step in to protect workers from union-busting tactics at the factory SF Leather in Turkey, after management fired workers who had joined the union and only offered to rehire them if they gave up union membership. SF Leather employs 190 workers and 90% of the factory's production is for British handbag and purse brand Mulberry.

Mulberry has a set of 'global sourcing principles' which includes commitments to international human rights such as freedom of association, but protesters say this is being violated by their failure to act. Mulberry had responded to requests to intervene by stating that they were investigating, and recently that they are waiting for the outcome of some legal processes in Turkey to conclude.

The Clean Clothes Campaign Turkey claim "Workers at SF Leather make 8000 Mulberry handbags a month for a pittance, but when they join the union to ask for higher wages they are fired, and Mulberry does nothing". The Union League say that "It is unacceptable that brands like Mulberry attempt to dodge their responsibility to the very workers from whose labour they extract huge profits each and every day".

Shoeholics, ditch your shoe guilt.

Labour Behind the Label's "Change Your Shoes" campaign, launched in the run up to Christmas, tackles working conditions and transparency in the shoe industry. Made up of 18 organisations across Europe, Indonesia, India and China, the campaign is asking the EU for regulations which promote, protect, and respect workers' rights throughout the supply chain. Specifically, the campaign is calling for shoe workers to be paid a living wage and for companies who sell shoes in the EU to be forced to publish all information on their supply chain, from the factory to shop floor, including the use of toxic chemicals and working conditions.

The campaign launched an App giving information about the shoe industry, and setting out the demands for change. "This is no cobblers – by downloading the app you will be taking a small step to improving the conditions for shoe workers globally, and making your soles feel better."

LBL state that over 24 billion pairs of shoes were made globally in 2014 – more than 3 pairs of shoes per person. The vast majority of shoes are made in Asia (88%), where working conditions frequently pose a serious health threat to employees.

It claims that the shoe industry is currently opaque and lacks transparency. Systemic human rights abuses pervade shoe making, from poverty pay, long working hours and denial of trade union rights, to significant risks to workers' health and the environment through harmful chemicals and dyes. The use of hazardous, toxic and carcinogenic chemicals in leather products seriously endangers workers, as well as the consumers in Europe.

Labour Behind the Label (LBL) is a UK-based not-for-profit co-operative organisation with an office in Easton, Bristol. The information in this article is attributed to LBL. If you would like more information please have a look at <http://labourbehindthelabel.org> or contact info@labourbehindthelabel.org

Britain's Secret Slavery Business
22.00 BBC2 11th March 2016

This programme presented and researched by Darragh Macintyre - interviewed West Yorkshire Police (Andy Leonard), West Midlands Police (Nick Dale), Gwent Police (Paul Frith), UK Anti-Slavery Commission (Kevin Hyland; the Bishop of Derby is also on the Committee - there is a website with other details).

The programme highlighted the networks of threats and fear generated by the exploitation of migrant workers who were given work in agriculture, car washes (Croydon wages were £10 per day - but no way the workers could leave the jobs because the documents and pass ports were held by the employers and they threatened the workers' families if they were known to be complaining to others - no faces shown) Workers on fishing boats worked for 100 hours over 10 days and had to give up their wages to those in control - again, threats to families unless they complied. (This programme may be available on BBC iPlayer).

Readers interested in exploring this theme further might like to visit: <http://www.corporatejustice.org/>, website of the European Coalition for Corporate Justice, and <http://www2.hull.ac.uk/fass/wise.aspx>, that of the Wilberforce Institute. (Ed.)

Book review:

"Swimming with the Fishes; 50 years of voluntary ministry",
Michael Johnson, Self-published through Amazon, 2013, 197
pages, £6.52 paperback (also Kindle); ISBN 9781482637038.

Rob Fox

It is always inspiring to read a memoir by a seasoned Minister in Secular Employment and this one is no exception. A product of the

Southwark Ordination Course, Michael Johnson exercised ordained ministry for 40 years before retirement, and clearly a significant ministry before and after!

A great deal of the 12 chapter content is autobiographical story and it is these sections I think readers will find most rewarding. Michael generally uses the description Non-Stipendiary Minister, which is what has been in common usage for most his ordained ministry. I note that he is also familiar with the term Bivocational minister and is right in saying that this applies to him, having had a balanced dual focus for ministry between work and parish. The latter was spent largely in Rochester Diocese, looking after churches in combined benefices. His working life, having started as a teacher in secondary schools, took a turn that may surprise the reader – I certainly found it intriguing, but I'll let you discover what it was! It comes across loud and clear how effective a ministry Michael had in each setting, and how much he enjoyed it.

Michael's personal story is engaging and will echo much of what we too experience. He also gives a simple and readable account of the history and development of voluntary ministry in the Church of England that is a useful starting point for the reader not already familiar with this. He picks up various themes that will be very familiar to MSEs: lack of support and understanding from the diocese and many (most?) stipendiary colleagues, frustration with arcane rules, the inaccessibility of much worship in a world now largely unchurched, and finding most support from those outside the institutional church. He also appreciates how the Church's preoccupation with buildings and maintaining existing structures, physical and organisational, detracts from mission, which, he rightly points out, is what we are called to in ministry.

As is often the case with self-published works, the book would benefit from proof reading and an editor's touch. There are extensive quotes – all well chosen to make a point, but no footnotes to help the reader follow them up. For example articles in this journal are quoted twice but are not easy to recognise as such; nor is there a bibliography. These barely detract though from what is a most readable book.

Seeing and Hearing: The Value of Irregular Clergy

Hugh Valentine

Address at the Conference of Self Supporting Priests of Oxford Diocese, The event's theme: '*Where do we meet Christ today?*'
11 October 2015.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be with you and to consider the place and possibilities of the SSM role in the life of the church. I shall use the term 'SSM' even though I don't like it and even though it covers – you might say – a multitude of sins. 'Unpaid clergy' seems to me altogether more accurate as well as slightly teasing and provocative, so that too may find mention.

A term I plan to use with more confidence is the slightly clunky *church-as-institution*. I think it is essential in our thinking to distinguish between the organisational entity and the wider, mystical and significant body of women and men who seek to follow Christ – the real 'church'. Indeed, my strongest image of the church has always been the rag-tag fluid body of the faithful (including the tenuously faithful) – all those followers of the enigmatic Jesus, of varied or even without denominational ties. Such a conception takes priority for me over equating the church with the institution, which I see as called to serve that primary body in its wider purpose and work.

I think of the church as also *promiscuous*, in the sense of always 'putting it about'; of irresistibly wanting to be everywhere, to understand everything, to share every conceivable human situation, to know every human grief and every human delight. More of that later perhaps, though here it is worth noting that SSM clergy are often slightly better placed to realise these *sacraments of engagement* than are others who are more fully domiciled within the church-as-institution.

Some biography

I should begin with some biographical context. As a teenager I rejected 'religion' as many do at that stage of virgin perceptions, on

the ground that it was the evident practice of hypocrites. I looked at the church and church people and found them unappealing. What was said and professed appeared to be very different to how they behaved. An example: war struck my teenage senses as repellent and tragic and in every sense destructive, and yet seemed to be tolerated by 'mature' Christian people and their official spokespersons, especially when their interests were threatened.

The same with poverty and social distinctions which so obviously (as it seemed to me) limited people's opportunities, depending on where, and to whom, they were born. It was to be some years before I came across A E Housman's line which summed up my overall teenage reaction to Planet Earth and its inhabitants: *'I, a stranger, and afraid/In a world I never made'*. I could not make easy sense of the adult world I was entering and I had neither the means nor the opportunity to confide that to anyone.

I don't know why, and it must surely have been part of the urgent need to make sense of the apparently absurd, but when I was seventeen I felt impelled to consider afresh this 'God' thing and so began attending the village church in which I had been baptised. But it did not work out for me, and I left after a few months.

A little later I stumbled upon a book which turned out to be a life-changer. Geoffrey Hubbard's *Quaker by Convincement* held out a heady vision of an exploring band of merry souls, seeking God in humility and without dogma and taking their brains with them on the adventure. I became a Quaker.

Taking Christ seriously; ordination

It was a few years later that I became explicitly Christian. So far as I recall it, it went something like this. I had realised that life is short, and that depth is usually to be preferred to breadth, certainly in *Important Matters*. I decided against a then popular approach which I perhaps unfairly called the 'pick and mix' approach: a bit of Jesus, a dash of Buddhism, possibly a hint of Karl Marx and a thick topping of New Agey stuff. And was I doing the initiating or was I

responding to *The One*? Whatever was going on, I decided I should try to follow and to live by the not-always-entirely unambiguous message of the itinerant Nazarene of the Gospels. As to his church and his modern-day friends, I was keeping my powder dry.

All that may sound too rational. There was certainly a rational aspect to it. And I recognise that I was influenced by culture, and that had I been born a Jew or Muslim, I might have made different decisions or have responded differently to the facts of my circumstances. But deciding to follow as far as I can the Jesus of Nazareth as described in the Gospels is something I have never regretted or renounced, even if the following has at times been at something of a distance. And at various moments I have lost him in the crowd or have myself slipped away, out of sight, for the metaphysical equivalent of an illicit smoke.

By unexpected and far from linear steps I was ordained, at the age of 33. Prior to that I had sought out someone who could teach me about the Christian faith in a way that was not available to me within the Society of Friends. I found Aelred, a priest-monk of the Community of the Resurrection who became friend and mentor. Later I dropped out of Quaker Meeting, finding Home Counties Friends more Universalist and less Christian than the Yorkshire ones who had nurtured me. In due course I started attending Evensong at the parish church, then the Eucharist. I was confirmed. Unexpectedly, the question about serving God as a priest visited me. I was a few years into being a local authority social worker – something I regarded as itself a vocation. All this was in the mid-1980s. I did some reading, found out about the French Worker Priest experiment and asked the church to consider me for ordination as a priest-worker NSM (as the acronym then was).

I was ordained 26 years ago; I find myself as astonished as the next person at how quickly time passes. In many ways it seems like yesterday. And it's been a terrific adventure. I stayed in social services for another 15 years or so, and in that time moved from managing a social work team in the East End to head of children's services. Of the many things I learnt, the theme to fascinate and trouble me the most was (and remains) the life of large organisations

– the powers and principalities of our day. For the past ten years I have worked for an endowed foundation operating in London. Through grant making we fund activity to help people trapped by poverty gain the confidence and skills most likely to secure them decently paid work across their working lifetimes. So as you see, I have been - and am - entirely unproductive in any plain economic sense.

What are priests for?

I know a few of you here but not many and so am in the dark about your own journeys and of how you conceive of being a priest. Views of ministerial priesthood vary in the Church of England, as we know. They straddle the simply functional to the sacramentally ontological. It can all be very confusing. I suppose SSMs reflect this spectrum – how could they not?

Perhaps this variety explains the difficulty unpaid clergy have in organising themselves, not as a church equivalent of *Militant Tendency* but as a constituency within the institution likely to represent both a valuable resource and a valuable perspective. Our collective failure to organise in this way seems to me a failure of our evolution as a clerical sub-species.

This brings me to a further distinction which seems significant. Amongst our SSM family we have different types operating from different impulses. I have always felt hugely excited about the priest-worker model.

The Church of England has never recognised the term or very seriously the vocation. It sometimes refers to MSEs: ministers in secular employment. It has never understood corporately the potential value of this focus. It is telling that whereas the Roman Catholics in France more than half a century ago authorised an experiment in which priests would take up the life of ordinary work *for theological reasons*, the Church of England made it possible to ordain working men (at the time it was only men) for solely pragmatic reasons: to have more hands helping out in the traditional parish model.

I maintain a website (www.with-intent.confiteor.org.uk) about and for MSE clergy in the Church of England and as part of that decided to visit every diocesan website to see what it said about the MSE model and about the SSM model. The results were unsurprising but disheartening. I will mention just two recurrent elements: first, hints that those would-be ordinands judged not to possess 'leadership capability' would be suggested for SSM work; and secondly the general mood music that a vocation to be an unpaid priest arises only in those over 50 or 55.

One diocesan website illustrated its meagre content about SSMs by confusingly blending ministerial, hierarchical and gender stereotypes in a photograph of a collared SSM female priest hanging out the washing in her garden. As Victor Meldrew might say, *I don't believe it*. You may, of your charity, write off these as simple mistakes. Another view is that they reveal the entrenched and operative views and attitudes within the church-as-institution. I know these are familiar gripes. The structural position of SSMs in the life of the church-as-institution has been well documented. And there is the valuable research in this area done by your own Teresa Morgan, and by Charles Sutton in Bristol Diocese, both of whom are running workshops later today.

There is nothing wrong with 'familiar gripes'; anyone who has thought about the history of justified causes will note that initial claims of injustice are often written off with that kind of putdown.

Clericalism and SSMs

But back to differing views about priesthood. I'd like to spend a moment or so-on a widespread contagious disease affecting the church you and I serve, and other churches beyond. This is not entirely irrelevant to our theme, and I think it should be of interest to unpaid clergy.

The condition is known as *clericalism*. Now, I have discovered over the years that it is very hard to raise this and have a good discussion about it. The question seems to belong to that order of questions guaranteed to upset people just by asking it – a variant of the 'have

you stopped beating your partner' kind of question. Clergy tend to go tight and defensive at the mention of it. Of course, this helps no one and it limits the discussion of what ought to be regarded as a significant aspect and *dis*-ease affecting all church people, lay and ordained. The best clarification of the condition I have found - without attribution of blame - appears in a footnote to an article by The Revd O A Dyson called *Clericalism, Church and Laity* in the 1985 C of E publication *All Are Called: Towards a Theology of the Laity*.

He says: *'In discussing 'clericalism' [in this essay] the author is not imputing to individuals bad faith, lack of integrity or ineffectiveness. Clericalism, understood as the undue influence of clergy, is not to be interpreted in individual terms but as a pervasive reality in which clergy and laity are deeply involved whether or not they want it, and whether or not they know it. Openly to discuss clericalism which can be found amongst clergy and laity may help us to understand more accurately a significant feature of the Christian environment to which we belong and to analyse some of the hidden, and none too attractive, influences to which our Christian lives are exposed'.*

Clericalism is really, at its heart, a mind-set, supporting a reality, in which control of the church rests principally or wholly with the ordained class. I reckon it ought to be a notifiable condition, followed by strict isolation and a programme of decontamination during which the wearing of the collar is banned and the patient is required to make their way in the world without any reference to their clerical status. But like many states of ill-health (especially of the psychological variety) it is not always immediately visible and can easily be disguised. Clergy are the organising principle of the church, and their central role is too often at the expense of the laity.

One consequence is the infantilisation of the laity. This claim is often met with ridicule. I raise it here because it is important and because it might be claimed that SSM clergy, not entirely unacquainted with the subtle hierarchical nuances of English clerical life *and* because of their experiences elsewhere may – in part - be an antidote to this condition.

The dangers of socialisation into roles

Yet this requires such individuals to resist the ways in which being *formed* into the role of a priest tends also to form one into *the ways of the institution*. You may be familiar with the idea of *professional socialisation*. When we train in a role we are taught not only the knowledge needed, but – subtly – the ‘shape’ and culture of the role and office; taught *how to* be a police officer, lawyer, teacher, night club bouncer or whatever. The same kind of thing operates in other spheres: we are subtly taught *how to be* a man or woman, a mother or father, a white or black person. Some kinds of cultural transmission can be positive and in other respects rather dangerous.

In case this sounds too general, let me give an example. Not long ago many professions would teach (not in an explicit but a coded way) that they – the experts – knew best and that the role of the consumer of their services was just that: to consume; to take what was given. Yet now we realise such an approach sometimes did harm and weakened accountability. We ‘consumers’ of services – think of medicine and education and policing – are now encouraged to play a role; to ask for explanations, to share in decision making about our lives, to be consulted. This has been a major shift in really no time at all. It may well be a bore when the patient turns up having done the rounds on Google, but overall this trend must be welcomed. True, it can allow the ignorant and opinionated to remain both of these things, but it may also help move us from being passive to taking responsibility.

Now consider these trends in relation to the life of the church and (far more importantly) in relation to our individual responses to God and Grace and the life and meaning of Jesus of Nazareth. Much clerical training and formation has not only imparted knowledge but has also transmitted attitudes not dissimilar to those I have mentioned. The net result has tended to be that the *laos* are not treated as equal partners in the adventure of faith. You may know the sloganized description of the role of the laity as being there to *pray, pay and obey*. It seems faintly comical. It does however sum up an aspect of a truth of the church-as-institution and I doubt that

even the most egalitarian and humble amongst us has not at times caught a whiff of the intoxicating aroma of being a cleric within a clergy focussed church.

There is more I'd like to say on this but I realise it is a bit of a hobby-horse and that on the whole it is not rated as serious or significant. Perhaps in a dying institutionalised form of the church it may not be that important. Yet it is something that SSM clergy are well placed to consider. Leslie Newbigin wrote, "*The primary action of the Church in the world is the action of its members in their daily work*". How true. And how scandalous are the ways in which unseen institutional practices curtail that.

Conversations as tools in the life of the church

One final variation on this theme, if I may, and it is to do with the place of *conversation* in the life of the church. I have begun to think of this as rather like those surveys that ask about the frequency of sex, and the conclusion of the researchers that people say they have far more of it than they do; likewise conversations. Perhaps we confuse communication with conversation.

There is certainly a lot of that. The reason *conversations* should be important in the collective Christian life is because they mirror – indeed, draw us into – the great conversation we see embodied in the Incarnation. An unlimited God choses to enter the muck and muddle of our human condition; choses to do so surreptitiously, obliquely, gently and courteously. A disclosure is made, a response is sought; there is patience: room is made for a conversation over our short lives with the God who made us. At times we are responsive conversational partners. At others we turn a deaf ear or cease to listen because we are busy talking or preparing to talk. What is prayer but part of this lifelong conversation with God? And how limitless in form is such prayer, only occasionally involving words. Yet the church appears to favour communication over conversation. Liturgically, the conversations are mostly vertical: clergy to laity. Mono-voiced liturgy is still the dominant form.

Conversations amongst clergy do not always fare better. Your experience may be more positive than mine, but I have never found clergy chapter to be a place of undefended, exploratory conversation.

For some years I have played in my imagination with the idea of SSM clergy and their sympathetic stipendiary friends regularly meeting in the upper room of a pub where we might experiment with – learn to hold – conversations. The working title for this gathering is 'Chapter & Verse'. There'd be none of the popular 'theological expert' speaker stuff followed by questions; instead we'd seek new ways of sharing knowledge, learning from one another, caring for one another, seeking God and reading the signs of the times. We'd aim to retake theology back from the academy and the 'experts' (or at least from its specialised annexation from our lived lives) and seek to learn afresh what it means to be stewards of the mysteries of God as Paul invitingly puts it.

Some of you may know of Alan Ecclestone and his model of Parish Meetings which he instituted in the Sheffield parish he served from 1942 to 1979. He wanted the local church to discover what exploratory meetings and true conversations might look like (and give birth to) when not dominated by the clergy. His Parish Meetings are described by Tim Gorrige in his book *Alan Ecclestone: Priest as Revolutionary*. Church events and meetings tend to be dominated by clergy - though 'dominate' may suggest too strong an element of wilful or conscious control. Yet it is they who usually call them; they who usually define the agenda; they who usually open and close the event by invocation and benediction.

The laity tend to comply with these patterns, indeed, to expect them. This model seems a poor one, and to my thinking is infantilising. It is common elsewhere in hierarchical structures. Modern corporate events (sometimes diocesan corporate events) are often over-managed, highly controlled and with limited opportunity for questions and dialogue. There is no real conversation - which is always horizontal in nature. At such events communication tends only to the vertical.

By way of an aside: Some of you may have attended the 'Self Supporting Ministry Consultation Day' in London in May [2015], organised by Ministry Division. It was my first. One of the three aims of the day one was to 'resource conversations' (about) self-supporting ministry'. If you enjoy being over-managed and hemmed in on every side by Post-It Notes you might have thought you had died and gone to heaven. I felt rather angry by the experience. We were told what topic to discuss with a neighbour and given an unrealistically short time in which to do that; then we were instructed to share our thoughts with the other people around our table before having to write down key points on post-it notes. Inevitably these were collected, collated, typed up and posted to the web. It was like some time-and-motion man's version of the Offertory. All seemingly very efficient but as far from proper conversations as one can imagine. The Post-It Note tyranny is well rooted now in churches and organisations. I have nothing against Post-It Notes – I like them – but not when used in this misleading way as short cuts to collective discernment and wisdom or pretend conversations. God is said to have invited Moses up the mountain to be given tablets with the law and commandments [Exodus 24:12]. Now we send Post-It Notes in the other direction.

Alan Ecclestone thought it vitally important that the church (the gathered body of Christ's followers) should meet outside the liturgy and services so that its members should be enabled to speak from their experience, gain a measure of confidence and be listened to. He realised this might take time, as people found their voices and also learned to truly listen to one another. It is always worth the effort. This is being the local Church. Local and at once universal. SSM clergy – by definition – are *likely* to have wider experience of multi-voice team activity and of conversations as equals with a variety of people, and of handling varied roles. In many cases they have had more extensive experience of being laity. I am not saying all SSMs are great; some can be as clerical as the extreme Anglo-Catholic and some can be as unsubtle in presenting Christ as the worst smash-and-grab Evo. But leaving those extremes aside, as an element in the church-as-institution this recently emerged SSM sub-species can and should make a difference.

The Joy of Irregular

I rather like the use of the term *irregular* to convey mild alarm and surprise whilst married to a welcoming, pragmatic embrace. I have no evidence he ever used the term, but in my mind I can hear Robertson Hare as Archdeacon Henry Blunt in *All Gas and Gaiters* saying 'it is rather *irregular* bishop, but I see no harm in it..'

You and I are irregular and whilst it's no reason for smugness it should be a reason for thankfulness and a little fun. You may have heard of the *Baker Street Irregulars* – the fictional characters who appear in various Sherlock Holmes stories as street children who are employed by Holmes as intelligence agents. They get to the places the regulars find harder to reach. *Perhaps so with us and our kind.* We can get to some of the places the regulars find it harder to reach.

This is true of MSE clergy for sure, operating as they do in a myriad of different occupational settings. It is true too of all SSMs, save for the most clericalised or narrowly focused. And it is not only a case of getting to more places, but at its best – at *our* best – of *seeing and hearing a little differently*. Remember, please, O A Dyson's earlier definition of the clerical mind-set where he is at pains to say '*the author is not imputing to individuals bad faith, lack of integrity or ineffectiveness*'.

This is not a criticism of parish-based stipendiary colleagues but an observation about the narrowing effect on us all when we are too fully and exclusively tethered to specific roles within specific confines. How then might the irregulars become even more useful in the life of the church-as-institution? Individually, by being the best we can be. In this we are no different to stipendiary colleagues. We must remain inquisitive and adventurous; fierce in self-appraisal, generous in giving of ourselves, attentive to the leadings of the Spirit, anxious to read the signs of the times, suspicious of dogmatic claims about the mind of God and exploratory - even tentative - in preaching, always drawing on human experience as the vehicle in which and through which we meet Christ.

As a body of SSM clergy the answer is going to be different. I would very much like SSM clergy to better organise themselves, and to make requests – demands even - and to lobby for change. I am doubtful that this is likely, for the reason given - that we are such a varied group. Some SSM clergy seem rather churchy and have little if any interest in the world beyond sanctuary and parish. Others seem to operate with something of a firewall between their church and beyond-church lives.

More relevant perhaps is that process of *professional socialisation*. In-bred into ordinands and clergy is something of a submissiveness in relation to authority in the church, most obviously in relation to bishops. Maybe this is because we have done that dangerous thing of spiritualising it, so that we somehow think that in being submissive towards bishops and other 'senior staff' we are being submissive to Christ. A Benedictine thing, you might say. A dangerous thing, too. I can see for myself the impulse to regard bishops as Fathers (and now Mothers) in God, wise and to be obeyed. Observation and experience have taught me otherwise.

But really, there is a primordial aspect here, you might even say a romantic one, which can do a very great deal of harm. And often in parish church life the clergy enjoy (or endure) similar fanciful projections from laity, and must decide whether to feed on such things or use them to help both parties to greater maturity; a maturity hinted at when we hear Paul speak of 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' and when our Lord calls us no longer servants but 'friends'.

If SSMs were pushy...

So I suspect that an obstacle to SSM clergy playing a fuller and necessary role in the life of the church is that we shall remain – collectively - rather passive and 'humble' (though not humble in the right sense of the word). Yet, it is not impossible that sufficient of our number may come to see the benefit of organised action. I think this has to be outside the model of clergy chapter. I am not holding my breath, but if we were to rally (in a proper way, of course...) there are some changes SSMs may wish to see.

The first is that we begin to be properly integrated into the councils and structures of the church. London has just created an Associate Archdeacon role (though the post has, I think, gone to a stipendiary priest). That seems to establish a bridgehead of sorts. And there surely can be no principled reason why some form of bishop could not be appointed from amongst SSMs.

The second is that SSMs having charge of parishes ought to be expanded, and not only when it is expedient to do so.

Third, although I am no supporter of honours, if the church wishes to persist with titular honorary canons and prebendaries then SSMs must be proportionately amongst those chosen.

A fourth would be that the skills and knowledge of SSM clergy be gathered and recorded in such a way as can be called upon when needed by the church – across dioceses as well as within them. I am thinking especially of the vast amount of experience many SSMs have gained in other settings. This is an enormous pool of current knowledge and skill, and it is not mapped or tapped into as it should be. And related to this is the potential role of deployable SSM clergy in serving parishes during incumbent vacancies (I hope, like me, that you never use the term *interregnum* which means a gap between 'rulers' – the very model we should seek to change).

A fifth – and an easy one to deliver on – is having a bishop who holds a national brief for SSM clergy. I am told we had one, and that we have one no longer. [*A previous Bishop of Newcastle. Ed.*] Even so modest a shopping list will trouble some SSMs, because it sounds *pushy*. The suffragettes were thought *pushy* for wanting the vote for women. As were Blacks who sought equal treatment under the law. As have been gay and lesbian citizens seeking the same equality under the law. It is instructive to note that the church-as-institution has rarely been in the forefront of these calls. Sometimes it has been vocal in opposing them.

This again brings us to questions of power, which I am sure you will have sensed in much of what I have so far said. We can't – in our short lives – escape power. It shapes our lives and our world; it is

embodied in people and institutions and movements; it can be godly or demonic. And the demonic seems to have moved on from the odd herd of Gadarene swine into the powers and principalities of our day: into institutions and ideologies and 'operating principles'. And they operate rather more subtly than once they did. William Stringfellow's writing is incisive in exploring this (in the context of the USA of the 1960s and 70s), as is that of Walter Wink whom Stringfellow inspired.

The powers and principalities of our age are always and powerfully anti-incarnational and they dominate and control. It is SSM clergy are amateur in the very best sense of the term, and we give our labour and our minds without charge; we should therefore be freer: freer from ambition in the clerical careerist sense (rare amongst our stipendiary colleagues but not unknown), freer to engage in some holy agitation without worrying about our next move or future opportunities. Our relative financial independence should be put to helpful use in taking some greater risk. But it requires a growth in a proper self-confidence.

I think there is some truth in the commonly reported perception amongst SSMs that they are regarded as a second class of priest; and part of the problem is that we may ourselves have internalised that to some degree. If so, our work and witness is hampered to that same degree.

There are classes of clergy

Maybe there *is* a distinction of clerical classes, but you don't have to be around for long to see that it is not, fundamentally, a stipendiary v. self-supporting one. God has been a little canny that that. We may sometimes find clericalised and narrowly focused SSMs, and we often find open-minded, self-critical, questioning and fresh stipendiary colleagues. And sometimes they suffer under the constraints of their role as we do ours, and feel as unsupported or unrecognised by the institution as we sometimes might.

So the clergy constituency I value the most are those, whether paid or unpaid, who seem confident yet tentative; are fundamentally

inclusive liturgically and pastorally; who can lead or follow as is needed, who are attentive to the affairs of the world as well as the interior life; who reject sentimentality and niceness in liturgy and in personal relations; who are in the institution but not wholly of it. Especially those who use their office to help others grow into Christian maturity and to grasp something of the meaning of the priesthood of all believers.

Perhaps what we need amongst SSMS *and* SMS are more *feral* clergy. If you think there is any truth in what I have alluded to about how we are formed in the clerical role and shaped by it in ways that are not always good, and that we are at risk of becoming domesticated into the inoffensive, 'nice' and only peripherally relevant stereotypes of the Anglican vicar, then maybe we need to change. *Feral* can mean 'having returned to an untamed state from domestication'. Whatever you think about fast-tracked 'leadership' courses for the clerical high flyers I hope you might consider sympathetically our need for something vaguely opposite, or at least contrary: processes which strip us of the unattractive certainties of the institution and school, or re-school us, in the tentative certainties of the Gospel about love and mercy and comradeship and cooperation.

Where then do we meet Christ today?

Our theme is 'where do we meet Christ today?' The answer has to be: where we have always been able to meet him. But that is not quite as straightforward as it seems. It is – and ought to be – rather teasing, Zen-like.

The Gospels do not insist that Christ appears only recognisably as himself. His presence is often disguised. Perhaps always disguised. Earlier I said that I think of the church as *promiscuous*. I have known some people – clergy as it happens - who have reacted strongly against my use of the term, for reasons you can guess, I'm sure. They have heard it as meaning 'seedy' rather than 'indiscriminate'. As it happens, I was using it in at least both senses. Religion can lend itself all too easily to the splitting-off and to the evasions we ourselves embody, and we can use it to accommodate rather than transfigure our own distortions and prejudice. Unhelpful

notions of purity and impurity often get thrown into the mix. I have no doubt that we can encounter Christ in the bordello as well as the sanctuary, and all places between, and in places of horror as well as places of peace. (I might mention perhaps my own horror when I hear clergy – often but not exclusively cathedral clergy – say something along the lines that ‘people come to here (church or cathedral) ‘to find peace and God’. As though God is domiciled in such buildings and must be visited there, like a housebound relative).

Christ, in whom we dare to believe and whom we seek is surely a great fan of disguise. It is not only angels we may unwittingly entertain when welcoming our brothers and our sisters. It seems very probable that God is the archetypal masquerader: buried, camouflaged, enshrouded, inconspicuous, masked, veiled; irresistibly making self-disclosures and revelations in all manner of indirect ways in a thousand and one different guises. And all under cover of what we rather blithely refer to as ‘ordinary’ life. The same ‘ordinary’ life in which we – as SSM clergy (ecclesiastically semi-detached and with a foot in other arenas, ourselves sometimes under disguise of one sort or another) have the great privilege to operate and serve.

www.hughvalentine.net

More on the Oxford SSM Conference at:

<http://www.oxford.anglican.org/ssms-one-size-does-not-fit-all/>

4 Ways the Church misunderstands Spiritual Formation

Frederick Schmidt

The journey into God that transforms us and leads us into deeper connection with God lies at the heart of spiritual formation. Formation creates a space for that encounter to occur, and it nurtures the practice and virtues that makes that journey possible. But it is also widely misunderstood, even by churches. In looking back over decades of attention to the task of formation, here is a brief outline of four models for spiritual formation that are important elements of the experience, but do not work in isolation from one another.

Spiritual formation as Inoculation

Take a class, get formed, get out, get on with life. It's important to begin, but it is not enough. Spiritual formation thought of as inoculation doesn't work because formation is ongoing and lifelong. The limited attention given to the task of formation by the inoculation model telegraphs the message, "This isn't important." But it doesn't work because the task of formation is less about getting a perspective and few techniques, and more about a lifelong process of conversion. Do we need to begin somewhere? Yes. Is beginning enough? No.

Spiritual formation as Practice

Pray regularly or go to chapel or church and, presto, you're spiritually formed. In other words, "Try harder." Spiritual practice certainly helps. Regularity in prayer, worship, fasting, pilgrimage, other spiritual disciplines, as well as the very effort to make a place for conversation with God creates a space where formation can happen. The purpose of spiritual practice is to put us in a place where God can find us. It's not about finding God.

But practice can also degenerate into checklist spirituality and trying harder is not the point. The best of spiritual practice is not an end in itself and for that reason "trying harder," like all forms of asceticism is often counter-productive.

Spiritual formation as Bible study

The quintessential feature of Protestant spiritual formation is the study of Scripture. That has been the case from Luther on, and it can be traced to his Latin maxim, *sola scriptura*, "Scripture alone."

There is no argument here on one level: a knowledge of Scripture is essential to spiritual formation. Clearly the Bible provides us with the foundational vocabulary for the Christian faith. That said, the writers of Scripture are also clear that a knowledge of biblical truths does not insure spiritual maturity. As such, the study of Scripture

contributes to formation and it is necessary, but it is hardly adequate or an end in itself.

Spiritual formation as Rule of Life

Renewed interest in monastic rules surfaced some time ago and “writing your own rule of life” has become an important part of spiritual formation in some circles. Such rules have the advantage of embracing the whole of life, and as such, they are an advance over the haphazard “piling on” that is so much a part of the “Try harder” model described above.

But the word “rule” or *regula* has to be understood in all of its dimensions for it to have the desired effect. A rule of life is about patterns, not prescriptions. It is not meant to be enforced, but to guide, and it needs to be applied “artistically” with a view to its goal, which is the cultivation of spiritual virtues and attention to the spiritual journey. It is not an end in itself and it is not meant to foster spiritualized stoicism.

So, how are these four understandings related or contribute to a larger vision of spiritual formation?

Spiritual formation has to start somewhere, so beginning is important. Spiritual formation does rely on practice, because it creates a space for God to find us. Spiritual formation depends upon the study of Scripture, because it is the Bible that provides us with the basic vocabulary of faith. And spiritual formation depends upon attention to the whole of life, as we seek God. But the goal, which is a relationship with the living God, is like any other relationship. It requires love, time, and attention.

Events

Rediscovering the laity

***An interactive day of exploration, discussion and debate
Tuesday 3rd May, Carr’s Lane Church, Birmingham, 10.00 –
15.30.***

Keynote Speaker: Elaine Graham, Grosvenor Research Professor, University of Chester, "Whatever happened to the laity?"
Other speakers include: Revd Dr Janna Collicutt, Adviser on Spiritual Care of Older People, Diocese of Oxford; Simon Foster, St Peter's Saltley Trust; Dr Anne Richards, Church of England Mission and Public Affairs Team.

No charge for the day but places need to be reserved, by contacting Graeme Smith (g.smith@chi.ac.uk) or Alison Webster (alison.webster@oxford.anglican.org). Tea / coffee available; lots of food outlets close by.

LICC – Holiness and Hope in a Hostile World: A Day in 1 Thessalonians

Date: Tuesday 10 May 2016

Time: 10.30am-4.00pm (*coffee from 10.00am*)

Venue: LICC, St Peter's, Vere Street, London W1G 0DQ

Cost: £18 (*includes lunch and light refreshments during the day*)

Faith in Research

Annual Conference of the Research & Statistics Department at Church House's (CofE).

Wednesday 18th May 2016, at Novotel, 70 Broad Street, Birmingham, B1 2HT; 09:30-17:30

Chaired by the Bishop of Manchester, the conference aims to provide insights from keynote speakers: Steve Aisthorpe (The Invisible Church: Learning from the experiences of churchless Christians), Mary Hawes (Rooted in the Church), and Dr Bev Botting (Research highlights, including Church Census 2016).

There are also opportunities to attend two of four breakout sessions which will tackle: Ministry, Millenials, Growth, and Curacy.

Attendees can expect to gain from the conference:

- An insight into research assessing the challenges facing the Church.
- An overview of some of the work being undertaken centrally at the National Church Institutions to understand and address these issues.
- The chance to discuss and debate the findings: their relevance to your situation and the practicality of solutions.

Tickets cost = £70.00. The last day to book is **11th May 2016**.

Details of the programme are available through the website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/facts-stats/research-statistics/faith-in-research-conferences.aspx>

For more information about the venue, Novotel, please visit <http://www.novotel.com/gb/hotel-1077-novotel-birmingham-centre/index.shtml>

CABE events

CABE SUMMER PARTY – Wednesday 8 June at 6.30pm.

A fun opportunity to network with other Christians in business leadership. (Also the AGM)

HUGH KAY lecture – Wednesday 5 October

CABE is excited to announce that Paul Vennells, Chief Executive of the Post Office will be speaking at our Hugh Kay Event
This will take the form of an interview allowing opportunity for interaction and debate.

To book CABE Events contact Jayne Payne events@cabe-online.org

ICF Members and Friends evening – annual lecture and AGM. Tuesday 21 June, 2016, at 12.30.

Milleret House, London, W8 5HH. Speaker: Ram Gidoomal.

More details about ICF at <http://www.icf-online.org/>

CHRISM 2016 Conference, 15-17 July

This year we are at Foxhill (<http://www.foxhillconferences.co.uk/>), Frodsham, Cheshire. Foxhill is a comfortable and popular conference venue, situated on the outskirts of this small town, with views over the inner Mersey estuary. Access is excellent: a few minutes off the M56 and M6, rail station on the main Manchester – Chester line, which passes through Warrington Bank Quay, on the West Coast main line. All rooms are en suite, with 16 single and a number of double rooms. CHRISM has exclusive use of Foxhill for the weekend. Places are £160 for members and spouses, £170 for non-members. Bookings to your Editor – details on the enclosed flyer or inside cover.

Our theme is ***'MSE in a changing world of work'***. Work and workplaces continue to change apace. Together we'll look at what is changing around us, and the effects on work of Globalism, Pluralism, Individualism and the death of the Institution, plus visits to local workplaces.

MSE in a Changing World

Phil Aspinall

Work and workplaces continue to change rapidly. The summer conference will give us a chance to consider what this means for our working lives and for our mission and ministry in the increasingly secularised and de-Christianised world in which we now live and work.

In the previous edition of the Journal, we reported on the Colloquium to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Worker Priests and included four criteria for considering these changes, which we reproduce here:

1. Globalisation. The extent of global connection is new in the whole of human history, and so challenges us to consider how we make the global humane. What does it mean to be working globally, and to be in contact with many different peoples (both physically and electronically)?

2. Pluralism. We are surrounded by diversity particularly in our places of work - a plurality of politics, religions etc. They are present and we are present in our work. So how are we to enter into and use the constant dialogue both cultural and international?
3. Individualism. This is the new reality – it exists – and many people are trapped in a prison, divorced from collective relations. Home working and self-employment are on the rise. What is our role to challenge this, to re-awake in our work the sense of community? How do we call people to vocation and relationship – the call to serve others?
4. De-Institutionalisation. People and society are increasingly detached from the former institutions of state, family, church etc. Where do we encounter people outside these institutions – how are we to receive them? How are we to build institutions in the new humanity – to rebuild for the service of all.

During the weekend we will think about each of these factors, and hopefully draw some conclusions. This is a conference for anyone who sees their work as their ministry or is concerned about how we discover our shared humanity amid all these changes. Please use the enclosed flyer to encourage your contacts and colleagues to attend.

CHRISM Annual General Meeting 2016

The CHRISM AGM will take place at 8pm on Saturday 16th July 2016 at Foxhill Conference Centre, Frodsham, Cheshire.

Agenda

1. Minutes of 2015 AGM
2. Matters arising
3. Presiding Moderator's report

4. Secretary's report
5. Membership report
6. Financial report
7. Subscriptions for 2017
8. Election of officers and committee
9. Election of CHRISM nominee to CHRISSET
10. Date of next AGM
11. Incoming Moderator's remarks

The meeting will be followed by a discussion on the purpose and future of the CHRISM Library.

Any motions for discussion should be sent to the secretary, Margaret Joachim (margaret.joachim@london.anglican.org), a minimum of four weeks in advance of the meeting.

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

Nominations are required for the positions of Incoming Moderator, Secretary, Journal Editor and Committee Members, and should reach the secretary 24 hours before the meeting starts.

Advance dates for 2017!

Not like CHRISM to be this organised, but already booked are ...

CHRISM Reflective weekend – a return visit to The Briery, Ilkley, Yorkshire, 24-26 February 2017.
(<http://www.briery.org.uk/wordpress/>)

CHRISM Annual Conference – 14-16 July, at Westminster College, Cambridge. (<http://www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/>)

Resources

Learning Pastoral Imagination: A Five-Year Report on How New Ministers Learn in Practice.

From a leading research institute in the USA, ***Auburn Studies***, it releases six key findings from a study of learning ministry in practice and their implications for theological education. Copies of the report can be downloaded at: <http://pastoralimagination.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/CSTE-LPI-030116.pdf>

It reports on a five-year project following the experiences of 50 recent seminary graduates as they make the transition from 'imagining ministry to embodying pastoral imagination.' The project started in 2009 with overarching research question: How is pastoral imagination formed through practice in ministry over time? Pastoral Imagination is defined as: "an individual's capacity for seeing a situation of ministry in all its holy and relational depths, and responding with wise and fitting judgement and action."

The report succinctly describes the historical background, conceptual and methodological context and sets out six major findings, each illustrated with stories from participants.

- i. Learning pastoral imagination happens best in formation for ministry that is integrative, embodied, and relational;
- ii. Learning pastoral imagination centers on integrated teaching that understands and articulates the challenges of the practice of ministry today;
- iii. Learning pastoral imagination requires both the daily practice of ministry over time and critical moments that may arise from crisis or clarity.
- iv. Learning pastoral imagination requires both apprenticeship to a situation and mentors who offer relational wisdom through shared reflection and making sense of a situation;

- v. Learning pastoral imagination is complicated by the intersection of social and personal forces of injustice;
- vi. Learning pastoral imagination is needed for inhabiting ministry as a spiritual practice, opening up self and community to the presence and power of God.

It concludes by setting out implications for theological education, ministry, church and society. It should be of interest to anyone with a care and concern for ministerial formation, lay and ordained. If 61 pages are a bit much you can view a short video introduction to the project that may encourage you to read.

Oxford Diocese – SSM paper

The Diocese of Oxford has published a booklet extolling “The Gift of Ordained Self-Supporting Ministry”, available for download at <http://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/final-version.pdf>

Teresa Morgan contributes a section on ministry in the workplace.

Experiences of Ministry Survey

The results of the 2015 survey have now been published by Ministry Division (Church of England) and Kings College, London. A 7 page summary, by Dr. Mike Clinton, is available to download at: http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File///EMS_2015_Respondent_Findings_Report_final.pdf

Theology in Sneakers

A website worth a visit, <http://www.theologyinsneakers.com/> Sections on Apologetics, Christian Living, Doctrine, Science and World Views.

And finally ... Succession Planning

A new manager spends a week at his new office with the manager he is replacing. On the last day, the departing manager tells him, "I have left three numbered envelopes in the desk drawer. Open an envelope if you encounter a crisis you can't solve."

Three months down the road there is major drama in the office and the manager feels very threatened by it all. He remembers the parting words of his predecessor and opens the first envelope. The message inside says "Blame your predecessor!" He does this and gets off the hook.

Six months later, the company is experiencing a dip in sales, combined with serious product problems. The manager quickly opens the second envelope. The message read, "Reorganize!" He starts to reorganize and the company quickly rebounds.

Three months later, at his next crisis, he opens the third envelope. The message inside says: "Prepare three envelopes."

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 below).

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

Membership Secretary

Mike Harrison 15 Vicarage Gardens, Llandudno, LL30 1RG
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**Submissions for the Journal (if written: A4; if electronic:
.txt, .rtf, or .doc format) should be sent to:**

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36 Norman Road, Stalybridge, Cheshire SK15 1LY
E-mail: rob.fox36@gmail.com

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