

## ***TOMORROW'S WORKPLACE***

The 2005 CHRISM Conference was based on themes developed by Michael Moynagh and Richard Worsley in the 'The Tomorrow Project' (see the book review later in this edition). Michael spoke to the Conference in two of the sessions and gave a consummate over-view of the main themes and findings of the Project. We were also pleased to welcome Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford, to our opening session on Friday evening. As many will know, Richard is both well-informed and keenly interested in this area and it was a pleasure to meet him.

The research was only published in July this year, so the Conference was one of the first fora to discuss the finished article. Much of the discussion took place in groups and we begin here a summary of the findings of and questions raised by each. Each group looked at the issues for the future of work raised from a particular perspective, as shown.

### **In respect of globalisation:**

What signs of hope can we see?

- A wider understanding of the world and all its peoples, cultures and needs.
- Through and beyond the commercial to a universality of civilization.
- That the hi-jacking of the world by the West is being rebalanced by emerging economies.
- Engagement in dialogue between faiths and between cultures, leading to new truths about God and from God.
- Recognition of the need for higher interpersonal skills, especially mediation, to create a sense of greater humanity and what it means to be community.

What opportunities are there for MSE?

We can see a role to:

- Confirm people's identities of belonging to communities.
- Complement modern technological communications (e-mails, mobile phones, electronic conferencing etc) with the need for and skill in face to face meetings.
- Promote and create dialogue with other faiths and opportunities for a greater common search for truth.
- Be in the place (i.e. at work) from where globalisation is driven.
- Celebrate a common experience, moving from noticing and respecting diversity to building value through diversity.
- Be reconcilers and discerners.

What key idea, fact or theme do have we for:

MSE generally? *"The truth that lies between"*

CHRISM in particular: *"New expressions for new situations"*

*(meaning giving voice - language, languages, interpretation, global communications - to where God, work and church are, and are going).*

### **In respect of skills shortages**

Signs of hope:

- Broader scope for vocational courses within formal education;
- Employers engaging more with the on-going learning of the workforce;
- The increasing shortage of stipendiary clergy will drive churches to not just to use MSEs, NSMs and lay people to plug the gaps but to reconsider the structures themselves;
- Stronger links between the leisure industry and the desire to learn, with a strong pull to spend on leisure.

Opportunities for MSE:

- Ministry to all parts of the workforce (we noted a clear distinction here from the Mission de France, which aims at blue collar sectors);
- Our own influence on how things are done and the value placed on people;

- 'leave the one and look for the ninety-nine'.

#### Opportunities for CHRISM:

- Promote the role of MSE as the Churches re-structure;
- Contribute to upskilling MSEs in this ministry (materials, experience, communication);
- Contribute to the lay discipleship agenda;
- Offer a vocational approach to training MSEs, as opposed to the current academic approaches to training for ministry.

No CHRISM Conference would be complete without visits to workplaces and this one included some crackers. Three groups were sent out and returned with the following observations.

#### Templar Shopping Precinct.

The Manager, Wendy White, is training for Non-Stipendiary Ministry in the United Reformed Church and was with us throughout the weekend. She introduced us to most of the staff on shift and showed us the behind the scenes operations. (*As it happens I'd been in the precinct the day before buying lunch while visiting our office nearby - Ed.*) The key characteristics we found were:

- Emphasis on retail as an experience, not just an activity (a formerly run-down suburban precinct has been turned into a genuinely nice place to come through ten years of effort by the staff);
- Participants in the experience are seen first as people – retailers, shoppers, centre employees and the local community;
- It is a shared experience;
- The centre aims to be a village green – a place people can come and meet;
- The importance of Wendy as a driver of the ethos of the place was clear: facilitator, setting out the basic premise that everyone is worthy of respect, modelling the behaviours she encouraged;
- Incentives used wherever possible to encourage these behaviours.

This ethos was demonstrated by all the centre employees seen; a cleaner went about his job with clear pride and care. The central area is frequently used for demonstrations and when we visited a local dance school was demonstrating salsa; Richard and Jan Dobell gladly joined in:



#### The City Centre

Hugh Lee's church, St. Michael at the North Gate, sits right in the centre of Oxford but has no-one living in the parish! The presence of the building is itself significant – and a valuable retail site itself – and it has to become a focus for people working or shopping in the area. A Fair Trade group wanted to set up an outlet in the church and outbid a commercial company to do so!

A concern the group picked up on is the way many students stick with the College Chapels and are not prepared by this for the realities of working life. Slowly though, St. Michael's is becoming meaningful to those who come to the city centre not just because it is there but because of what goes on in it.

### **Multipart**

As Unipart, this vehicles parts business was the one part of the old British Leyland that was a real success. Since branching out on its own, with a change of name, the company has moved into logistics.

The visitors were impressed by the emphasis on employee well-being: on site there is a gym, hairdresser, chiropractor, chiropodist, physician, library, IT centre, and courts for racquet sports. A great deal of effort also goes into increasing staff's employability, with a wide range of training provided.

Work practices are also 'enlightened'. Groups of employees can examine problems in the work chain and propose solutions and there is an emphasis on care for customers and quality of delivery. The one cloud is that as a UK company with little business outside the UK there is a concern that as global competition increases it may find it difficult to hold its share of the market.

### **Some final thoughts**

As well as the Tomorrow Project, Michael Moynagh is contributing to the work on new expressions of church. He noted that recent research in the USA shows around 4m as regarding their principal church as being in the workplace (*this Journal has run items on many of the networks working in this area over the past three years or so – Ed.*). If this is the case then we should expect to see a similar trend in the UK; the numbers will be lower, but the phenomenon will be here. MSEs are uniquely placed to support and contribute to this expression of church itself and to the theology that underpins it.

A common characteristic of 'new expressions of church in the past has been the tendency to become inward looking, to be concerned more about internal structures than outward mission. The house church movement of the 1970s and onwards was little different from the conventicles of 400 years earlier in this respect. Now something genuinely different is afoot, and MSEs are there.