

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: 4 October.

(The views expressed in the various articles in this Journal are those of the writer, unless stated otherwise. If you would like to copy items, please consult the Editor).

Editorial

By the time the Journal arrives with you, the Commonwealth games will be in full swing in Manchester. The city is already buzzing, the stadium looks great, and my daughter – after months of nail biting – HAS been accepted as a volunteer (which she has been looking forward to for seven years). It's quite a coup, and a real fillip after two unsuccessful Olympic bids. All right, it isn't the most glamorous place, but the locals are – for the most part – friendly, and everyone seems to be making a huge effort to welcome the many visitors expected. 72 nations represented, from very large to very small, from every part of the world, and the hundreds of thousands who will come to watch.

The term 'commonwealth' is a full of meaning. Since the 16th Century it has meant just what it says, the 'common wealth' of the people – what we share and enjoy together, what we preserve and develop for those who follow us. And the Commonwealth does enjoy celebrating what its members share together.

Our world is full of small 'commonwealths'. The place we work in, the family we belong to, the Church we worship with (no, not the building!), and, of course, CHRISM. There are echoes of what we mean to one another as MSEs – how we have helped, supported and shared with each other – throughout this edition of the Journal.

It struck me, as I was 'putting to bed' the last edition, that No. 81 meant it had to be around 20 years old, and that we ought to celebrate this. In the early days of the 'Newsletter', publication was not always exactly three months, and after consulting the founder Editor we agreed that now was a good time to celebrate the 20th anniversary. Taking pride of place therefore

are pieces by three previous editors: Michael Ranken, Nicholas von Benzon and Dorrie Johnson. It is intended to include contributions from other editors in the next edition. (As you can see, this one is rather big!) There are also pieces from the USA and reflecting the European worker priest movement, showing how wide our 'commonwealth' is. Closer to home there is a mix of theological and topical reflection, bearing the typical MSE characteristic of engaging with the world in which we work and minister.

There is much to celebrate together as MSEs, and in the contribution the Journal has made in advocating and supporting MSE. It has been a good 20 years, so here's to the next 20!

Rob

20 years of the Journal!

As with most good things, no-one is exactly sure when the 20th anniversary actually falls, but I had a suspicion that it might be imminent whilst preparing Issue 80. In the early days the Newsletter was not precisely quarterly, but it has grown steadily over the years. It has been my privilege (and quite a challenge) to follow skilled, able and dogged Editors!

To celebrate 20 years of advocating and supporting Ministry in Secular Employment, I therefore invited my esteemed predecessors to say what being Editor had meant for them and how they see MSE has developed in these years. Read and enjoy!

In the beginning

Michael Ranken

In my round robin of Michaelmas 1981, sent to as many NSM's as I had addresses for, suggesting that a Newsletter among ourselves might be a good thing, I quoted Gamaliel:

"If this idea or its execution are of human origin it will collapse, but if it is from God you will never be able to put it down."

Well, it started immediately after and it hasn't collapsed yet, though it has changed in a number of ways.

At first there was the simple paper newsletter which I edited and published for seven years with no shortage of either copy or funds, and which then was taken forward by others. Now it is a substantial and much better looking Journal. The constituency has moved, from predominantly parish-based NSMs to the smaller group within them who see our ministry predominantly as MSEs. And with that change I believe there has come also a greater theological and intellectual seriousness (though no loss of fun) in the content.

Those changes, mostly after my time, are all in the direction I had hoped for in the beginning. Long may the whole enterprise continue, and continue to develop.

Maybe we should be patient in supposing that it truly is from God" and will not collapse - after all, it was some 40 or 50 years, so they say, 'til the Gospel writers felt confident enough to put their understanding of the activities of God in ordinary human life into writing.

The Journal at 10

Nicholas von Benzon

I was editor of what was then known as "A Newsletter among Ministers at Work and others concerned" (which sounds a mouth-full!) from October 1989 (no.30) to December 1992 (no.44). The newsletter was thinner than today's Journal, but the print was smaller and we seemed to cram a lot in. My

secretary generously typed the copy in her spare time, and I was never sure whether there would be enough contributions and always chasing the printers to make sure the magazines went out in reasonably good time. Still it was a great experience and one which helped me to think theologically about Ministry in Secular employment.

I particularly remember three highlights:

- 1) the 1990 Conference at which we each tried to write or say something about spirituality in our places of work. The variety of ways in which we expressed this transformed conventional views of both workplace and spirituality.
- 2) the mission statement which Michael Ranken proposed and we adopted at the Rydal Hall Conference in 1992. I still quote it in sermons and at other times as the best description I know of what Christian Ministry in the world is about: "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."
- 3) Isoelde Boehm the Lutheran priest who worked as a check-out assistant in a German supermarket and inspired many of us with her story at that 1992 conference.

In 1995 I retired from my job as a solicitor and was appointed team vicar of a rural benefice in the Salisbury Diocese. I hoped to be able to find ways of bridging the gap between the church and world of secular work. I am now rector of another rural Parish in the Diocese of Worcester, and to date have had little success in engaging with the world of work. There are many reasons for this: the demands of keeping the church going, the fact most rural church-goers are retired, my lack of available evenings and

weekends to meet with those who work during the week, and no real interest or support from those at the centre involved in Christian education and training (I think the topic is generally considered too difficult and largely irrelevant).

So now I must resolve to try harder to find ways of supporting those at work and reflecting upon God's presence in the work place. My inability to do this during seven years of parish ministry has emphasised just how important the ministry of those in secular employment really is, and how the church desperately needs those ordained and lay who are able to reflect theologically on their secular work and distract the church from its navel gazing preoccupation with its own survival!!

Nicholas also reminded me of his first editorial, from which the following is taken. It is as apt today as it was then:

Apart from being the year of the Fifth National Conference, 1992 will also mark the 10th anniversary of the Newsletter. It is interesting to look back at Michael Ranken's introduction to the first Newsletter in February 1982:

"In a sense, this Newsletter 'just happened'. It is an unplanned birth - not an uncommon thing but sometimes a bit perplexing as well as exciting. But then, humanly speaking, the birth of Jesus was like that also, so we are in good company. The conception was in the Open Letter I sent to many of you, it grew during the time that so many of you were replying to me."

Since then the Newsletter has grown and matured. However, far more important has been the development of non-stipendiary ministry over that period. The marks of that development have been varied but they undoubtedly include the National Conferences, appointment of Bishop Kenneth Woolcombe and more recently Bishop David Smith as Archbishop's advisers on non-stipendiary ministry, the Bishop's Regulations

and now, in most diocese, the appointment of Bishop's Officers. In the midst of these developments, non-stipendiary ministers have I think generally gained in confidence and have a clearer idea of purpose and identity. As a group we no longer wonder so anxiously who we are and what we are doing.

The Newsletter has changed over the years to reflect this. It has undoubtedly become more concerned with that aspect of the ministry which focuses upon secular employment but has, I hope, at the same time remained of interest to those whose ministry is primarily in their parishes. We have frequently acknowledged that ministry cannot be entrapped in one place or another but is an expression of the life of the minister wherever he or she may be.

Having said that, the continuation of the Newsletter in future years will depend on our increasing our circulation and subscribers. Apart from money, I am also keen to receive your written contributions for publication (*here, here! Ed.*). The quality of the Newsletter depends on your contributions. By and large these come from individuals but as more groups form and local groupings become stronger, I do hope that the Newsletter can carry reports about the activities of those groups. (*That invitation still stands. Ed.*).

The 'teenage' Journal

Dorrie Johnson

I have recently been speaking to several people who are training for ordination. Most are working in a secular environment but none had heard of MSE. Most ministers in secular employment, moreover, are not ordained and are often unrecognised so I begin to answer the two questions posed, by the present Editor of the Journal, with a question? Have

twenty years of MSE history passed almost unnoticed, despite its healthy birth, by the big bad (or good) world and hardly noticed by the church within that big bad (or good) world. That is my saddest and most challenging reflection.

I have to hold that question when wondering what being the Journal editor taught me about MSE. We were fortunate enough to have numerous excellent contributors, most were MSEs (we decided long ago it was too difficult to say MsSE) but many of them were employed in training colleges and courses and dioceses. Their support was strong. Some of them came to learn and share discussion at St George's House, Windsor, to our gain. That was a significant happening while I was Editor. Many non-MSEs in church and other settings offer support in all sorts of ways.

I relearned from Journal readers that you can please some of the people some of the time but not all the people all of the time. MSEs are a mixed bunch of folk some of whom want light entertainment and others something challenging. I learnt to present a straightforward publication largely without comment – it wasn't *my* journal, it belonged to us all. Having said that, I was immensely privileged to receive the mail that I did. I honour the confidences.

I learnt that the Journal primarily reached the converted. Although it went to college librarians and to College and Course Principals, that did not mean it was read or even known about.

A significant development was the increased number of international links and their geographical expansion. MSEs are very mixed. Regional links were initiated.

CHRISM produced a theological resource booklet and papers continued to be published. The training document began its

life. Finally the Web site (thanks Michael) was in its embryonic state and is now growing into a beautiful child. Perhaps MSE history has not passed unnoticed. Perhaps MSE is the grit in the shell of church and world, and the resulting pearls are small but precious. It was good to reflect.

From the new Presiding Moderator

Peter Johnson

It is an honour to be Presiding Moderator for this year. Ever since I joined CHRISM I have enjoyed the fellowship of members, the support from others sharing common aspirations and the challenges of living our motto. It was these three elements that were particularly in mind when I tried to plan, as requested, the coming year. Using our motto as the guiding aim and the objectives identified at our residential conferences the following presents what members consider to be of importance when trying to: "help ourselves and others celebrate the presence of God and to see and tell the Christian story there." There is nothing prescriptive in what follows, merely suggestions based on our conversations. Finally to increase our support for one another we could develop a prayer list of members. If you would like your name to appear on this list please forward your name, work and address to me at revdocpj@btinternet.com by September 2002. We shall then distribute the list to all those on it.

"To help ourselves and others celebrate the presence of God and the holiness of life in our work..."

Theme A - CHRISM structures / resources for CHRISM

Committee

- To provide opportunities for fellowship and forums for discussion and theological reflection through week-

- ends, conferences and the Journal;
- To provide material and personnel resources for the members to use;

Membership

- to respond to invitations to conferences, weekends and requests for articles;
- To use the material and personnel resources as opportunity arises;
- To pray for fellow members and their ministry.

Theme B - Publicity

Committee

- To promote CHRISM and its objects through various media;
- To assist the members in publicising local initiatives;

Membership

- To publicise CHRISM and its objects locally;
- To inform the committee of local initiatives that may be of interest.

Theme C - External training / Education / Development

Committee

- To promote MSE training for ordained and lay at national level;
- To develop material for use with local groups;

Membership

- to use resource materials to promote MSE as a ministry.

Theme G - Recruitment

Committee

- To provide training courses with resources about MSE and CHRISM;
- To be a resource for local people;

Membership

- To initiate contacts with fellow lay and ordained;
- To use CHRISM material and personnel for recruitment.

...and to see and tell the Christian story there.”

Theme D - Using words

Committee

- To provide forums through meetings and publications for members to experiment with language;

Membership

- To acquaint fellow members with language used in secular workplace through fellowship weekends, conferences and the Journal.

Theme E - Resources for external use

Committee

- To provide training material and publicity material for members;

Membership

- To use the materials as and when appropriate.

Theme F - Church contacts

Committee

- To promote CHRISM and MSE at national level;
- To be a resource for members at local level;

Membership

- To use contacts and opportunities to promote CHRISM and MSE;
- To use Committee resources when appropriate.

(Peter succeeds Sue Gibbons as Presiding Moderator from the AGM on 20 July).

Medic, Mate, Mother, Minister
- Life Story so far.

Felicity Smith

(Continuing our series of profiles of Committee members, Felicity's story is as engrossing as any!)

I had a happy childhood despite being the only child in a single parent family from the age of 8 years. I loved school and going to church, probably because I made so many friends in both, and each gave great feelings of security. When I was 16 I met a woman doctor and gradually felt called by God to study medicine, despite the fact that I was much better at arts and classics and found science subjects a big struggle! I was greatly relieved to get a County Scholarship as finances were pretty constrained at home.

Three years after graduating I drove my first car 180 miles from home in Bristol to Lincoln to visit friends (known from school and university) and their first baby. There I met the man I was to marry, Ian. We have been together for 35 years, have three children and one grandchild. Full-time medical work and raising a family were not appropriate for me. I settled happily into Family Planning and Women's Health clinics and later did 5 years of Genito-Urinary Medicine weekly sessions as well.

From about 1975 we were supporters in the Movement for the Ordination of Women. As a woman doctor it seemed a natural concept to me and I could not understand the objections, though I did not identify myself in this role. I was surprised and very ambivalent in response when I felt that God was calling me to become a deaconess (early 80s), also to do this as a doctor i.e. "no leaving medicine to go into the church." I had friends who were Ministers in Secular Employment and was also aware of the Worker Priest movement in

France. I embraced the concept whole-heartedly and wondered why there were not more people involved in this way. My family was remarkably supportive throughout the 3 years of ordination training, although it did put us all through considerable emotional strain at times.

Working in Family Planning and sexual health, we encounter a great many things the Church says "No" to: sex before marriage, single parent pregnancy, abortion, homosexuality. My greatest reason for being an M.S.E. in this area of life is to be an outward and visible sign that "God in the Mass on Sunday is the same God in the Mass on Monday." When God said "Go forth and multiply" he gave us a remarkably strong sex drive, one that can over-ride commonsense, logic, religious and ethical boundaries and a driving force that we may need constantly to keep under control. This area of our life can be secret and hidden but the problems involved / raised need help – some of us are there to do this.

I was made deaconess in 1986, deacon in 1987 and priest in 1994, and continued my work in reproductive health care all this time, adding in regular sessions in the menopause research clinic at St Cross, Rugby. I scrounged enough finance to do two community menopause sessions per month with South Warwickshire Health Care.

Meanwhile, after initial licensing as a deaconess, I worked with the Diocesan Board of Social Responsibility on raising awareness in the diocese around HIV and AIDS and also around homosexuality and our response. God offers us unconditional love: people fear judgment and rejection. They are often crippled by feelings of guilt – frequently unfounded. To be heard and accepted, affirmed and helped is the work that God Incarnate, Jesus himself started. It is ours to continue.

After becoming a priest (I do prefer the word minister; it feels more inclusive and is more descriptive of all my work), I left the HIV/AIDS network of which I was a founder member and a Buddies coordinator for 5 years. I was licensed to St James Old Milverton, Leamington Spa – a small parish but very active church family, largely “lay-led” - and there I am once again a team member, not a leader.

My medical role is similar. I love the “hands-on” clinical part of my job as a doctor; I enjoy being part of a good loving caring team of workers (medical, nursing and clerical). All of us are about putting the patients and their needs first. We are accepting, affirming, non-judgmental and liberal with our T.L.C. and good at our jobs. The only thing we lack is governmental funding to expand our role and do the massive preventative work that is needed We share this story with many other skilled and able workers!

Today I received my five yearly re-accreditation certificate for continuing as a Family Planning instructing doctor. The accompanying letter read, “I am pleased to confirm to extend your recognition past the normal age for retirement as an Instructing Doctor.” I am 62! The shelf life is shortening sooner than expected.

Next year, with 40 years in the NHS to my credit, I shall cut from half time to quarter time. Hopefully Ian and I will be able to travel more, catch up with old friends, and spend more time with our family. I would like to stay with my friends at St James as an “M.S.R” – but not at an increased commitment.

The perplexity and challenge of retirement approaches with its relinquishment of some responsibilities and the continuance of others, intertwined with new opportunities – i.e. watch this space!

MSE and the scope of ministry

Rob Fox

(Many thanks to Peter Johnson for editing this article and making some excellent suggestions to clarify points. Comments and contributions in response for the Journal are most welcome).

A regular theme in the sporadic discussions among MSEs (mostly ordained, it has to be said) in the North West is the questions MSE pose about the nature of ministry itself. Why is it that MSEs so often see ministry differently from local church clergy? The ways in which we as MSEs see ministry (and I use the plural deliberately) beg questions about the relationship between lay and ordained MSEs, between MSEs and other models of ministry (lay as well as ordained), and how MSEs relate to the Churches as institutions.

What follows is not an attempt to say what the relationships and differences of perception are, still less to explain them. Rather it is to set out some suggestions for further discussion, to stir up the pot and see what floats to the surface!

(1) Job and Ministry: a dichotomy

'Ministry' is often seen as personal and as a personal activity. But is this a proper way to understand it? Job or role has long been recognised as a factor in self-identity in the secular world: "And what do you do?" is a familiar, loaded, question. The question suggests that a particular type of answer is appropriate, one we usually give. "I am a Customs & Excise Officer", would be my normal response (when not being mischievous!). We, and others, seek identity in and from our job, be it title or activity. It is hardly surprising that stipendiary clergy do likewise, so ministry is often defined in terms of the job some ministers are paid to do. 'Ministry' is defined as

“mine” and defines the person who exercises it, in the same way as a job.

If, however, we start from the premise of ministry as the work of God through the Body of Christ (a holistic approach) it ceases to be definable in terms of 'job'. This creates a dichotomy where it is used in the way just described. It has become a matter of identity for those in so-called 'full-time ministry' jobs, notably 'local church ministry'. It has become sociological, not theological.

(2) Wider theology of ministry

The holistic approach acknowledges that ministry will be expressed in different ways, through different individuals and groups, but stresses that ministry belongs to God and is expressed through the Body of Christ as a result of its relationship to and with God. Neither is it to be seen as merely conferred or gifted by God to the Church; it is a product and dynamic of the *relationship* between God and His people. It is therefore also dynamic in how it is manifested. How any one person or group will experience ministry and their part in it can be expected to change over time.

This approach also acknowledges the real dichotomy of the people of God being both the Body of Christ and 'organised' (in an institutional sense). The church as institution needs to know who its officers are and how they relate to each other, but acting as an officer is not synonymous with acting as a minister. The former often overlaps with the latter, and an individual (or group) may be acting in both capacities at the same time. The distinction is however important: the one belongs to the theology of ministry, the other to the theology of the institution (which is emphatically not ecclesiology - to approach the issue in these terms would be to confuse the two capacities).

(3) Relationship of MSE to the local church 'minister'

The weighting of the above two capacities is shifted. A local church 'minister' (whether ordained or not, stipendiary or not) will normally be operating formally as a representative of the institution for a greater part of their 'ministry' time (included in this are the legal and organisational functions and roles which go with local church ministry). Ministry as expressed through an MSE is likely to be much more weighted towards expression of the ministry of the Body of Christ. Even if in terms of time spent on traditional 'ministry' activities this is much less than the stipendiary local church 'minister'. The Churches as institutions (and clergy as representatives of the institution, including, I would suggest, a majority of NSMs) have a real problem with this. This appears to be because the dominant models and theologies of ministry are inadequate, seeing ministry as personal and defining it in institutional terms.

MSEs must however be rooted in a local church, grounding 'their' ministry in it. To weaken or lose that grounding is to undermine the identification of ministry as arising from the relationship between God and His people!

One of the principle institutional definitions which under-pin the prevailing models of ministry is the notion of church as representing a community, or, notably in those influenced by the charismatic movement, as a community in itself. The former can be seen in the attachment of the Church of England to the parish system (and other denominations to parallel patterns). There is some merit to both views, but neither is adequate to fit with the complex realities of social organisation (and arguably never were).

'Community' needs to be defined more widely and four basic types are suggested:

- Accident:** typically, a geographic community;
Affinity: such as a family, or a widespread group based on common values (such as a religion or nation);
Association: those who voluntarily join together for a shared interest (such as a local church, sports club, W.I.);
Activity: a shared place or activity of work.

Every individual will 'belong' to several groups, often several of each type. (The re-coil that frequently greets the comparison of 'church' with 'worldly' communities may be understandable, but it simply ignores the evidence). For each person the nexus of belonging represents 'my patch'. For an MSE the characteristics of this patch will generally be quite different from local church ministers; MSEs reach parts of society that local church ministers cannot reach!

(4) Is there anything necessarily ordained ... ?

No. Ordination needs too to be thought of in both institutional and representative terms. Any member (or group) of the Body of Christ may be 'ordained' by the local church for a particular expression of ministry. The institution 'ordains' its officers, who are in that respect also representative. Individuals may of course find themselves doubly ordained!

It is no surprise at all that MSEs tend to think of themselves as the same as the rest of the people of God. The surprise is rather that many stipendiary clergy think that they are different.

(5) MSEs as bridge-builders

The nexus of communities for an MSE is likely to have much more in common with those of a large proportion of local church congregations than stipendiary local church ministers.

In ministry within the congregation, the local community, and all the other communities to which the MSE 'belongs', they will experience being used by God as mediator and bridge-builder. (Local church clergy will also experience this, but in different contexts and ways).

MSEs cross the boundaries between the various communities to which they belong in ways that are more akin to 'the laity' than most stipendiary ministers have the opportunity to.

(6) Church as institution

Many of the comments at 2 and 3 above are also relevant here. Ordination can be viewed in terms of its functionality for the institution; this does not exclude or diminish other perspectives, but must be taken seriously. The institution needs officers to see that its administrative machinery operates correctly, that its symbolic activity is maintained, that the social cohesion of its member (voluntary) associations is upheld. Most, but not all, of these officers are 'Ordained'; most, but not all, are paid. To the extent that clergy are acting as officers of the institution, 'ordination' is the authorisation to act as such. This authority comes from the institution. What therefore are the Churches saying by ordaining some MSEs?

(7) Value added ministry

Another valid perspective on ministry is that the authority to minister comes in one sense from those who are ministered to. The effectiveness of the ministry of the Body of Christ is hampered without at least the passive consent of those who are ministered to. In this sense it is they who 'ordain' that the ministry is valid. Where an individual or group is seen to represent a 'church' (i.e. a church has formally 'ordained' or authorised in some other way that they should be its representatives) this consent will usually be more freely given.

MSEs find themselves, by virtue of the different communities to which they belong, in positions to both represent and exercise the church's ministry in the communities to which they 'belong'. Local church clergy, and those in Chaplaincy, are usually seen as outsiders, whose contribution (even if they can make one) is likely to be diminished because of this. The MSE is usually 'one of us', the 'vicar' usually 'one of them'.

The MSE is also in a strong position to represent those communities marginalized or excluded from the life of the church as institution or worshipping community by virtue of the lack of day-to-day experience of these communities on the part of the 'professional' minister.

MSEs thus play an essential role in the ministry that has been given to the whole church. They are in a unique position to play a representative role not by being part of the church as institution but as 'one of us' among the people with whom we work. MSEs represent the institution but also represent to the institution: they minister to as well as minister for. The authority for both comes from being rooted in the church and in the world of secular employment. If either is lost or diminished, so is the ministry.

An engineer down under!

Michael Powell

I have not quite faded out of CHRISM!

For the last six months I have been in Tasmania doing some fieldwork for what I hope will become a PhD on Built Environment and Biblical Theology - Tasmania because my daughter and her family live there.

I have been studying the building history of a group of small townships that grew up in the second half of the nineteenth century along four of the rivers that flow south from the Bass Strait, which separates north Tasmania from the Australian mainland. The rivers in question are the Rubicon, the Mersey, the Don and the Forth - a kind of Alice-in-Wonderland depiction of mythology and UK geography. The original townships have given way to the City of Devonport, which with a population of 25,000 is the fourth largest municipality in Tasmania.

The research is about relating these places, characterised by the crude buildings of the pioneers and a growing sense of architectural heritage, with Genesis 1-11, Nehemiah, some of the Psalms, some of John's gospel, a little of Paul and Revelation 20-22. It also has to relate to the fact that Aborigine Australian culture takes an entirely different approach to land and building from the European. The Aborigine belongs to the land in which he lives his nomadic life. He and the land are one. His concept of the building is that of the temporary shelter against bad weather. It is made, used for a while and abandoned. The European seeks mastery over the land. Once he is settled, building is more than shelter. It expresses mastery and evokes the European homeland. While the most interesting modern architecture seeks a distinctively Australian style and meaning, there is little of that in tiny, offshore, Tasmania.

This is secular theology. Doing secular theology, it seems to me, is part of secular ministry. Soon I shall retire completely from professional involvement with building. That will free me up to love it more and experience it in the way that everyone else does, not handicapped by the concerns of earning a living from it.

CHRISM, I believe, must not get bogged down in 'work' and ministry through 'work'. The 'S', the secular in our name, is much more than the narrow interests and vision of those who work professionally in any particular field at any particular time.

On the argument I advance, retirement from CHRISM is an absurdity - but not yet, for me, an economic necessity. The problem is with the 'E' in MSE - I've given up using it!

30 years of the German Worker Brothers and Sisters

Phil Aspinnall

In April I attended the spring meeting of the Arbeitergeschwiste, as has become my custom. It was held as usual at the former monastery of St Gottfried in Ilbenstadt, just outside Frankfurt. But this was no usual meeting, as it marked 30 years of the life of this group.

As I may have explained before, this group (or rather, network) comprises a mixture of people from the German-speaking area – Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Alsace. They include Catholic laity with a conviction to work among the excluded in their society, including Little Brothers and Sisters in the order of Charles de Foucauld, Protestants who have become involved by sharing the same agenda (mainly through networks in Berlin) and Catholic Worker Priests.

The focus for our work on the Saturday was several large sheets of brown paper stuck on the wall (eat your heart out Cap Gemini!), which formed the background to a time plan of the last thirty years. On to this, each participant was asked to contribute the events that have been significant for them over the thirty years period. (I mention this in the hope that

it might be a useful tool for a future CHRISM Anniversary gathering!)

What struck me as significant was the number of examples of the turning points – when someone, struggling with their own sense of vocation to life in the world, met someone else who was engaged in a similar form of Ministry. At last they knew they were not alone in their convictions. Perhaps there are also similarities here for us in CHRISM.

Other stories centred around a declared desire to become a worker priest, only to be channelled by a Bishop into work with young people in industry, or a desire to find a role with freedom from the institutional church, which turned into a form of community life. Other people had come though time spent living in alternative communities or through periods spent working for the church overseas. The challenging question throughout was “what from the past has a role in the future?”.

I contributed (among more personal events, such as my first meeting with Michael Ranken and Felicity Smith) the 1984 Nottingham meeting of “MSEs”. Way before my time, and I don’t believe the term MSE was even contemplated then – but highly significant for the development of the network which followed, leading to the founding of CHRISM.

But reaching the age of thirty leads to a certain introspection! The group has existed to provide fellowship and support for those who attend every six months. There is a real sense that, for many, this is the place where they are truly Church and can share most openly the events of their lives. But that is not enough: if more people are to be encouraged into these forms of Ministry, if the Church is to become less institutional and more integrated into the life around it, then

there is a need to go public – to declare the validity, value and, indeed, necessity of these Ministries. (Perhaps there is a message here for CHRISM as well, lest we be tempted to be drawn inward to a concern just for mutual support.)

So the theme of the Saturday evening Mass was “Putting the Lamp on the Lampstand”. Where, and in what ways, could we make more explicit what we do, how we live our lives and why we do it. The context might be the local church, our work or our community in which we live. During the Mass, we were each asked to place a candle on the Lampstand and declare – in what new way would we commit to making our calling more explicit. A challenge which we shall also put to the CHRISM Conference.

As usual, I shared some of the things we have been doing in CHRISM, including our work on Parables. My suggestion that “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Chemical Factory” was greeted by a stunned silence. But the point was brought home when I spent the few days after the conference staying with one of the worker priests in Griesheim – in the shadow of one of great chemical factories on the banks of the Main.

Living in An Other World:

BERGAMO - International Meeting for the European Representatives of Priest Workers - Prêtres Ouvriers (POs), 17th - 20th May 2002

Phil Aspinall & Stan Frost

Some Reflections from the English Group

We arrived at Bergamo without any bre-briefing on the programme or content. I had seen some draft notes prepared by the German group, and been told the theme was a follow on to the Strasbourg meeting last year. We discovered that the intention was to share the work that our national groups

had done during the year to take forward the output from Strasbourg !

So, overnight on the Friday, we got some thoughts together, based on our final review at Strasbourg, and delivered these to the meeting in French. We subsequently typed up the notes which follow - with apologies for not preparing them in advance. I think they largely reflect what we actually said !

PA

INTRODUCTION

Two volunteers from the CHRISM Committee were encouraged to attend the annual gathering of European Priest Workers, which this year happened to be in Northern Italy. Consequently the delegates needed little encouragement. Phil Aspinall and I had also been together at previous meetings, which traditionally occur over the weekend of Pentecost. We knew most of those coming from the other countries and Mario Signorelli, the host on this occasion, is an old friend from earlier get-togethers.

LOCATION

The venue was the Hermitage near Bergamo. It sits by the side of a church on a hill. There are the mountains which extend into Switzerland on the north side and a plain which stretches to Milan and beyond to the west and south. The surrounding countryside contains empty factories, the remnants of recent and historic local industry, horticultural poly-tunnels and vineyards. It creates a topical landscape adjacent to historic Bergamo which occupies another hill but which now extends well beyond the old battlements. On the Sunday we were taken on a guided walk of the city that included 3 churches before teatime! Phil noted the irony of spending time exploring the historic establishment that we were so concerned to see change and not seeing anything of the life of the ouvriers of Bergamo..

The Hermitage itself is a thousand years old and although abandoned and neglected for many years has been rebuilt and formed into a magnificent centre for retreats and other gatherings. There is an interesting library (largely in Italian), a small chapel and all the facilities needed for meetings and reflection - highly recommended for those who might be planning to take some time out. MSE's don't usually have sabbaticals except perhaps when they are between jobs - but do go if you can manage it. Our Rencontre fitted comfortably and the en suite facilities prevented any crowding which might have occurred in the original mediaeval premises.

HOSPITALITY

We were looked after in a laid back Italian style from the time of arrival to being dropped at the station or airport for our departure. Four of the French delegation travelled cross-country by car but most of the others used public transport. Mario was generous in his support and that of his volunteer group. They shuttled us from place to place, cooked and served the ample meals, fine wines and recipes of Bergamo. On Friday night the group relaxed watching a fine show of fireworks being delivered by someone in the valley. No one quite knew why, but it seemed an appropriate start to the Pentecost Weekend. After the sumptuous Saturday evening meal the fireworks were repeated though most missed them due to being in the library watching videos of the Genoa anti World Trade Organisation demonstrations and accounts of the responses of the authorities. These raised concerns that continued with us into the Sunday morning meeting and the mass at which Sebastian from Catalonia presided.

LANGUAGE STRUGGLES

Some of us tried to learn a few words of Bergamesci the local patois derived from French, German and Italian but thankfully we needed to use it only when setting tables and wash-

ing up. Fortunately, the 20 delegates - from Italy, Belgium, Catalonia, Spain, Germany, France and Britain - were very patient with each other as they picked their way through the French language and everyone was given a fair hearing during the round table discussions.

Written contributions were in French, apart from one tabled by the Italians and our own contribution, which made it easier to interpret the discussion. The diverse accents and occasional vocabulary difficulty enhanced the good humoured and light- hearted conversations despite the seriousness of the issues being addressed.

THE ISSUES

Each national group delivered a paper, covering a wide range of topics under the banner headline "An Other World is Possible",,, including: the 35 hour week in France, effects of telecommunications on health, the integration of homosexuals, agriculture and the impacts of globalisation on villages and the church in Spain; and the treatment and acceptance of refugees in Germany

There is continuing concern about the role and viability of the PO within a sometimes alien church. There is the risk of a schism between the 'younger' (less than 50 years old) and the older generations (les anciens!). We noted that half the delegates at Bergamo were retired. Also, recruitment is frustrated by selection processes that are more than reluctant to recruit ordinands who see their vocation as priest workers. It is time for the role to be clarified and perhaps re-invented to suit current circumstance - by the end of the weekend we had come up with the headline "An Other PO is Possible"! There needs to be a way of retaining the wisdom of the elderly and retired members whilst supporting, enabling and mentoring those who are new to the game and are working

in very different environments than those which prevailed even only less than 20 years ago.

An experiment at Bergamo Seminary has been operating for 5 years. The student body of 400 (mainly from Bergamo Diocese) includes a small group of those expecting to be PO. But the Bishop has now decided to discontinue PO recruitment. On the Sunday evening the guests to the al fresco supper included a young man who has been de-selected for ordination because he sees his role continuing to be a motor mechanic. His case prompted much heated discussion that evening and the following morning session. The principles, policies and attitudes within the Diocesan Church here neglected to acknowledge the value of this kind of ministry. This raises questions of how best to lobby, how to maintain a profile for a way of working that is so special but often idiosyncratic (as our own parables and reflections have emphasised). Those involved in this ministry seek solidarity from one another. This expectation differs from that of the wider Church that seems satisfied with a unified support only of the conformist parochial kind. There was a strong undercurrent of needing to find new ways of being church - "An Other Church is Possible".

New strategies and approaches are needed for the 21st century and the future. Small groups considered the significance and meaning of 'incarnation', others discussed 'resurrection' in the context of the global economy, globalisation and sustainability. These key concepts are driving political policies. The Church and the worker priests need to be appraised of the issues and to find ways of participating. The old industrial formulae are being replaced with different models constructed to encompass new situations and the pace of change as it affects industry and society. The PO and the MSE have to be prepared to slot in as opportunities arise.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objectives of the weekend were to endorse and develop some of the ideas generated at Strasbourg in 2001. Our theme of 'another world' was a declaration of hope in changing the way in which we work and the systems used. The radical view is to demolish and start again. Maybe it is more realistic to recognise the need to value what we have, acknowledging its faults, recognising the benefits we receive and doing what can be done to influence the structures. We need to work to ensure that the advantages are more widely spread - if that means less for those with the most then so be it. "An Other World is Possible – An Other Church is Possible – An Other PO is possible".

FUTURE MEETINGS

At Pentecost 2003 the meeting will be held in Catalonia - probably in Barcelona. 2004 will probably be another large international event which is likely to be held in Belgium. A key decision was made (which CHRISM has subsequently endorsed) to establish a group of national representatives to take forward the planning of future meetings. This International Committee is expected to meet in Paris, Autumn 2002 to decide on its format and organisation.

Common Worship Daily Prayer: an initial comment on the published version

Margaret Joachim

The publication of this new set of daily offices (albeit in draft) brings new emphasis to the practice of daily prayer, not just by clergy (who have to!) but also by all Christians, whether alone or as members of a congregation. As such it represents a splendid opportunity for the church to link its daily prayer focus to the daily lives of its members. Specific topics

for prayer are suggested for each day, both within the actual offices and also as a consolidated cycle of intercession. They are likely to be used as a foundation or prompt for intercessory prayer by many of the people using the book. What a step forward it would be if the topics helped people to claim and respect their daily activities as a major component of their vocation of service to God.

A quick analysis of the prayer topics proposed for the three daily offices (Morning Prayer, Prayer During the Day and Evening Prayer) and the corresponding seasonal variations reveals all the expected mentions of the poor, homeless, hungry, sick, oppressed, victimised and under-privileged. There is nothing wrong with that. Such people are, and must continue to be, a primary focus both of prayer and of work. The clergy, church authorities and assorted structures making up the church in general and the Anglican Church in particular are also strongly represented. But a search for “work-related” topics for prayer (generously interpreted) yields the following:

	Morning Prayer	Prayer During the Day	Evening Prayer
Monday	The day and its tasks	The media Those who travel	Nothing
Tuesday	The day and its tasks	The criminal justice system (wisdom and fairness)	Nothing
Wednesday	The day and its tasks	The medical profession	Nothing
Thursday	The day and its tasks	Ministers of the gospel Those who work for reconciliation	Nothing
Friday	The day and its tasks	Those in hospital Those in authority (right use of power)	Nothing

Saturday	The day and its tasks	Nothing	Nothing
Sunday	The day and its tasks	Nothing	Nothing

Seasonal material:

Advent, Christmas, Passiontide, Easter, All Saints - Advent

Nothing

Epiphany

Healing of the sick

Lent

Those serving through leadership

Ascension - Pentecost

That the world's rulers may work for justice

This gives a fascinating view of what the Church of England's liturgical specialists think the church's priorities are! We should pray for the criminal justice system - but need not think specifically about the people who work in or are affected by it. The media need our prayers (presumably because the church gets such a bashing from them – and will continue to do so on the evidence outlined above!) The medical profession gets two mentions, with a third if we allow “those in hospital” to cover staff as well as patients. There is a nod in the direction of leadership, authority and power. Education and social work, which normally feature strongly in prayer lists, are missing altogether. Travel is a concern (possibly reflecting the frustrating experiences of the committee while using public transport to get to meetings.)

If I stack supermarket shelves, work at a sewage treatment plant, or arrange finance for infrastructure projects, how does this plan help me to commend my work, and that of my colleagues, to God's care? Where can the ordinary daily pray-er see any hint that the church is interested or concerned or supportive of his daily working life? It can be argued that all this is covered in “the day and its tasks”, but that is unlikely to encourage individuals or groups of people towards a

deeper spiritual awareness of service to God in everyday life. "The daily round, the common task" is conspicuous by its absence.

The liturgical committee that produced this book has included pages for feedback, and says it welcomes comment. This is a first-class opportunity for CHRISM to produce an alternative cycle of intercessions – perhaps based around a series of vital activities (e.g. food production, distribution and preparation on Monday; heat, light, power and movement on Tuesday; health, hygiene and sanitation on Wednesday; finance, trading, taxation and public spending on Thursday; education, training, research and development on Friday; a leisure focus on Saturday and government (terrestrial and celestial) on Sunday.)

We've "done" theology – let's "do" prayer!

The Gospel in Plain Language ... continued

David Damon

The recent issue of the Journal with articles focusing on language, the review of Michael Ranken's recent book and the review of the NASSAM/APT conference focusing on spirituality all combine to suggest that something is being missed. A current joke in this country is about Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson going on a camping trip. Pitching their tent and turning in they were all set for a sound night's sleep. In the middle of the night Holmes shook Watson awake. "Watson, Watson, what do you see?" The good doctor responded: "Millions of stars, the planets, the whole celestial universe." Holmes replied: "Watson, you fool, somebody stole our tent."

We may be focusing on the celestial affairs but miss something major.

Michael Ranken's book was good as far as it went. I bogged down in the early chapters which really didn't help me get to a better understanding of "God talk" though I appreciated the testimony of his journey and an appreciation for where he is presently. Most helpful were the pages describing the conflict his present convictions has positioned him in and the management of that problem in parishes which have neither his perspective nor made a similar journey. For one I appreciated his caveat that as a visitor, where he wouldn't be around to repair damage his words might cause, he observed the medical rule "to do no harm."

Because psychotherapy is my familiar field I liken the book with the work of Freud. Much of Freud's work has been discredited and his processes discarded by modern and neurologically oriented science. What Freud did though, for which we will always be indebted, is to give us terminology and

concepts - words - which enable us to dissect and verbalize previously incommunicable issues. Issues that had been suggestively raised in art and drama but not academically addressed. Michael's book leads us in that direction. It suggests that the words we use and the concepts they express can stand another look, a critical examination in the best sense of that phrase.

Religion in its manifold forms is the only academic field I know of that does not make a habit of revisiting its roots, to be sure they are still firmly rooted. Academic religious journals make a practice of publishing the re-hashing of already published re-hashings of still other re-hashings. The validity or truth of the initial history, tenet or construct is lost to serious inquiry by believers. It is fair game to agnostics and their ilk.

What follows may be considered dangerous ground but it is where I believe history is taking the Christian Church, like it or not. The English church first appealed to me because it seemed to focus its mental energies on seeking the truth in a very mixed and muddied field of competing offerings. That attraction was fortified by the tradition of Episcopal Succession which was the physical expression of the intellectual. These two corner stones served well for many years. They weathered the test of Biblical criticism, higher and lower, the criticism of the Episcopate *esse* or *bene esse* and on and on. Then people like Hawking went inward and like Glenn went outward, and the foundations were up for re-examination. What the church offered in this new dialogue was inadequate.

I believe that is where the general population, for a variety of reasons, now finds itself. We are at a place where a population that grew up with flat world concepts suddenly finds itself in a global society. It is not that terra firma is changed only that how it is shaped and our account of it is in need of review

and re-expression. The church is at its best as primarily the agency of truth. That is the content of the can; the institution seems hung up on the container and the label, forgetting the content.

Where do we go from there? Let's begin with God for example. Ranken properly makes a fuss about wording and concepts as figures to express stuff. Let's be courageous and look at this God word, after all, that is being faithful to both Genesis and John. It is a contrived word. The Jews were right they made it YHWH, the unpronounceable expression of an idea. In our theology this translates to a verb form of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence - which passes muster as verbal expression for ultimates until we attach a noun to it, God.

Take that God form away and our credal propositions take on sectarian significance. Hawking and Glenn and others more popular but equally impressive and better known have done just that. The concepts are up for review - and in the popular mind we have been measured, weighed and found wanting. Our plea of "revealed truth" just won't hold water.

As a young priest a local protestant church had a revival program advertised with bumper stickers reading "God is the answer - such and such church." Being new and brash this priest printed stickers reading "God is the answer - do you know the question? St. so-and-so." Sophomoric but true. The reason we create this God concept is that we all have the same questions. That fact once was considered a classical argument for the existence of "God." People at all times and all places have wondered how everything got started and what we are doing here, there must be a creator or first cause. Something to fill the void. "God" became the answer. Not so necessarily. My grandson wore a bib with the words

embroidered on it "Spit happens". Ignore the scatological parallel. The words are correct, it is possible for things to just happen - there is a reason but not necessarily a cause.

In this rather lengthy journey I would like to think another view of the truth the church has to offer is suggested. Starting with a realistic recognition of our history, where we came from, how we developed our concepts, verbalized them, and then to restate them in ways all people might understand and acknowledge.

The answers we have given in the past were good for those times, they dealt with issues and concepts that were common. Those issues are still around - pain, joy, death, love - on and on. The importance of getting it right is underlined by the events of today. We are swamped by religious people who truly believe that their version of revealed truth is correct. If ever the rock of true faith were needed it is now (the eternal now?) but it has to be apparent on this side of the globe and on the other. It must be apparent to a believer and to an unbeliever. It must be true today and a hundred years from now.

The church says it offers truth but it isn't apparent except through the magic lenses of "faith". Truth is gospel and it is needed. Perhaps God isn't the answer. Perhaps s/he is the question.

(David is Editor of NASSAM's – The National Association for the Self-Supporting Active Ministry – newsletter, in which this article first appeared, reproduced by kind permission – and because it is good! He describes himself as 'psychotherapist, engineer and sea captain.' Though not necessarily at the same time, it is to be hoped!)

Tentmakers across the pond

A discussion on Tentmaking ministry formed part of the Alumnae Reunion Week festivities at The General Theological Seminary on Thursday, April 4. When 34 or 35 are gathered together ... the Spirit is present, and it certainly was in the presentation and discussion that took place. Drawing from NAS-SAM's Conference 2000 theme of "Tentmaking Ministry: Outer Fringe or Cutting Edge?", Davis Fisher presented on tentmaking ministry – past, present and future.

Many of the following "uses" of tentmakers were explored. What might you add to this list?

- supply
- interim
- as parish staff "resident clergy" on liturgical rota with full integration (all liturgical functions possible)
- as parish staff "resident clergy" on liturgical rota with limited integration (occasional and limited liturgical functions)
- as participant in parish "team" ministry (professional and collegial sharing of all aspects of parish ministry)
- part-time rector/vicar
- special ambassador to serve part-time in certain challenging situations in churches, e.g., helping a small congregation "die"; strategic planning for new directions; congregational development; conflict resolution; etc.
- resource for full-time rector/vicar regarding parish issues and challenges
- resource for parish utilizing individual tentmaker skills/training
- resource for diocese utilizing individual tentmaker skills/training

- § minister in the marketplace (for Christians and non-Christians)
- model for ministry, serving as a witness to the priesthood of all believers and the ministry of the laity

The presentation and discussion included terms and definitions, a brief historical overview of tentmaking ministry, a description of the ministry of tentmakers today, and an exploration of potential new forms of tentmaking ministry in our evolving church.

In the course of discussion, one collared cleric explained that he – painfully – had left the priesthood over 30 years ago and recently was received back into the church and into Holy Orders. He said that if he had been aware of tentmaking ministry, he probably would never have left.

Two current seminarians shared their enthusiasm over the tentmaking ministry to which they feel called. One of them is a civil engineer; the other, a medical doctor.

Feedback following the session indicated that participants not only enjoyed and learned from this workshop experience, but also would like the opportunity to explore the following three areas further:

- effective deployment of tentmaker clergy
- emerging models for tentmaking ministry today
- dialogue between tentmakers and full-time parish clergy

It appears that the agenda for future workshops is all set!

The Seabury Institute, the advanced studies department of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, has received files, books and other materials on tentmaking ministry to establish a **Tentmaker Resource Center** for the

purpose of education and research.

The Rev. Davis L. Fisher, one of the founders of NASSAM in 1971 and an active tentmaker for the last 33 years, provided these materials to form the Tentmaker Resource Center. The Center welcomes additional relevant materials from anyone willing to donate them. With an ongoing focus on the vitality of congregational life, the Seabury Institute serves as a natural home for the Center.

Assembled and categorized, these materials will provide seminary students as well as active tentmakers with research data that will help the church understand this old but re-emerging form of ordained ministry today, as well as seek creative uses in the changing church of the 21st century.

CHRISM Reflective Weekend, 2003

The 2003 weekend will re-visit the peaceful and comfortable surroundings of Holland House, Copthorne, Worcestershire, over the weekend of **14 – 16 February**.

The venue is about halfway between Evesham and Pershore, in the middle of Copthorne village, about half a mile from the A4538. There are rail stations at Evesham, Pershore and Worcester.

Full details and a booking form will go out with the next edition of the Journal, in the meantime - mark your dairies!

Pause for thought

Margaret Joachim

Something to think about; prompted by recent goings-on in the US, but I suspect not limited to there.

For the last four or five years the large US company I work for has been driven by Wall Street's expectations (and our senior leaders' explicit commitment) that we will equal or excel the performance of the top companies in the marketplace. Our attention has been frequently drawn to the performance and style of successful business leaders - some of whom have even been invited along to motivate us.

Now that the performance of many of these companies is being revealed as having been deliberately misrepresented, and some leaders are proving to be at best dishonest and at worst deliberately fraudulent, what are the goals that a decent company should be pursuing? How, if credibility on "the Street" continues to be the only criterion that really matters, can they continue to attract investment and good staff? At least part of the problem has been the relentless pressure applied by City Analysts, perhaps the current supreme possessors of power without responsibility, who set the ever-increasing targets in the interests of their firms, and also seem to control the general view that is taken of the performance, reliability and investment-worthiness of each competing company.

To set targets by reference to the marketplace is to abrogate one's own standards in favour of those set by the herd. I don't want to be the fastest horse on a muddy track (a phrase

used with approval, though in a slightly different context, by our CEO earlier this year). I want to be a consistent, reliable and trustworthy horse on a clean track.

A year or so ago we transferred many of our network staff to WorldCom, in a large and much-trumpeted two-way deal in which we took on responsibility for most of their IT, and they picked up the provision of our communications network. The transferring staff were told that their prospects as skilled network engineers were much better in a specialist communications company. Many were reluctant to move, but had to (under TUPE, in Europe) or lose their jobs immediately. Their prospects now are about zero.

(And have you noticed that, in general, the more a person or an organisation talks about honesty, integrity, etc., the less of it they have?)

Just for the record, I have absolutely no indication - and no reason to suspect - that the company I work for, or its auditors, are engaging in any underhand activity. I am a middle manager out at the sharp end of the business with our customers, and can see detail no further than the P&L under my own direct control. But the vast majority of people working for Robert Maxwell, Enron, QWest, Global Crossing, Xerox, WorldCom, General Electric, the two companies currently under formal investigation in the UK and maybe others whose problems are not yet in the public domain were - or are - similarly at arms' length. Do we have responsibilities beyond that of doing our own jobs in the light of our own principles and to the best of our abilities?

The West rejoiced recently at the fall of communism. But every system contains the seeds of its own destruction, and the principles both of evolution and of thermodynamics tell

us that long-term stability in any system is an anomaly. What else will have come to light between the date on which I wrote this piece (2nd July) and the point at which you read it? How should - can - do we respond as MSEs?

The old Compline prayer comes to mind: *Protect us, O Lord, through the silent hours of this night, so that we, who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, may rest upon thy eternal changelessness.*

The e-mail exchange Margaret's thoughts have already elicited include this thought from Ian Smith:

Is it time for a major, authoritative, report called: 'Faith in the City'? Seriously, I think it is and CHRISM would be a very suitable pressure group to persuade 'The Church' (whatever that means) to commission it and for CHRISM to influence who is on the working group.

A capital idea (excuse the pun). I think there will be others interested in such a project too: ICF, Ridley Hall Foundation, Edward King Institute, CABE. Responses are most welcome!
Ed.

Twenty Years a Misfit

Peter Graves

*They gave him a job that could not be done.
He smiled as he went to it.
He tackled that job that could not be done
And found that he could not do it.*

It is my firm conviction that the challenges faced by MSEs over the past couple of decades are being faced by their clergy colleagues – both NSM and Stipendiary in the field of Parish ministry. It follows that the church's establishment could circumvent much frustration, stress and wasted effort by considering

the observations of MSEs.

Since being ordained in 1982 to become NSM curate in a country parish, I have often been reminded that non-stipendiary means second-class. Nothing wrong with that really but there have been occasions in the past twenty years when I and others like me have striven for a recognition of our ministry only to have our usefulness to the Church equated to our ability to mimic the role of Parish Priest. The only model in which ministry could legitimately happen has always been the Parish Model. 'Pretend Priests' with full time secular jobs are clearly unable to contribute on equal terms.

Where were the role models for those ploughing a lonely furrow?

If the Parish was the only area of legitimate ministry for NSM – why did it not feel legitimate? I was always conscious of how far short of expectations I fell. *Whose expectations?* The 'Real Priest' is a competent and gifted shepherd in charge of a flock of lost sheep. The NSM is part of the flock really – but somehow qualified to stand in for the real leader on occasions.

If the non-existing role model was a problem it ceased to be so after the early years. I was fortunate to meet Michael Ranken around 1984. Just meeting up with one other NSM like Michael was a meeting with one of the few kindred spirits in my particular neck of the woods. Our discussion was a veritable catalyst that enabled me to recognise the ministry in which I was unconsciously engaged. The community at the work-place was united in its adherence to a secular employer but as varied and fragmented in its range of spirituality, needs and gifts as any over-large congregation in any Parish. Despite the affirming usefulness and response to my priesthood at work, the Church in its wisdom continued to disre-

gard any kind of ministry that was not of the Parish. Once I stopped looking for official affirmation, life as a minister became more sustainable with a sense of real relevance to the Gospel.

If you have become bored with my treatise on attitudes to NSM/MSE bear with me. I believe the stipendiary priesthood now finds itself in the wilderness that we tentmakers trod earlier.

Currently there is a shortage of priests and a lack of funds to pay for more. Those clergy who are being stretched too far still strive desperately to carry out the obsolete functions of the older structures. To quote Wesley Carr in his 1985 book, 'The Priestlike Task',

"The power of God is believed to be available as resource, so that the church feels that it must be able to accept every expectation and meet every need."

Look around! One minister to many parishes; house for duty; long clergy vacancies while the lay teams search the horizon for a new 'shepherd'. All these are part and parcel of the life of the church in the twenty-first century. The early retirement of more than a few stipendiary clergy suggests that life in the vicarage has more than its fair share of stress. In the secular world, employers who wantonly expect employees to cope with increasing work-loads and broadened responsibility pay the price of firms on a downward spiral. To plead for help or guidance appears to produce little response other than a reminder that true believers lean on the Lord and He is sufficient for their sustenance. Fundamentalist people managers are a dangerous species in the real world! In the church they get away with it because if you do not cope, it is because your personal faith is lacking. To quote Wesley Carr again,

"No church can offer its ministry of priesthood unless its organisation is reasonably congruent with its task."

It may not appear so from the holy heights but down at the sharp end where ministry happens the organisation appears to bear little relationship to the traditional task to which its ministers feel called. It is a short-term solution always to buttress the thinly spread clergy with retired, NSM and LOM colleagues and thus maintain the delusion that the 'old style' of ministry will survive.

The incongruity of position felt by MSEs – being expected to contribute because of *'musts and oughts'* within an irrelevant system - has been rather guaranteed to produce a feeling of personal incompetence and unreadiness for the task. Incongruity for ministers of all sorts, stipendiary included, comes from the striving to manage an overload of responsibility combined with an 'official' anticipation that a minister worth his/her salt will be able to cope.

Thank God for a supportive (multinational company) employer who gave me the strength to carry on a ministry within a spiritual organisation that was, and is, less compassionate in its management of people than many of its secular counterparts.

The priest of today and tomorrow needs people management skills that are neither taught to ordinands or new priests, nor are they even recognised as important – or relevant – by the church's Personnel Department. My heart goes out to ministers who are driven by a sense of vocation but trapped by *'musts and oughts'*. It just will not work in the way it used to. Neither will the transfer of those *'musts and oughts'* motivate the lay teams in any parish to give of its best. They can also be a pretty good deterrent to would-be new church members!

Treasurer

The estimable Keith Holt has decided it is time to hang up his quill and abacus as Treasurer, from the end of 2002. We are therefore looking for a suitable volunteer to work alongside Keith during 2002-3 and take over from him next year. Keith has prepared a full job description, setting out the tasks and responsibilities of the post. This is available directly from him or from the Editor (e-mail addresses on rear inside cover).

The salient features are:

- § The Hon. Treasurer is a Trustee of the Christians in Secular Employment Trust (CHRISSET), a Registered (Ecumenical) Charity, number 294910, governed by the requirements of the Charity Commission. The Hon. Treasurer is appointed by the Trustees and formally reports to them. However s/he is also a member of the CHRISM Committee, working closely with it.
- § The accounting year ends on December 31st and the final accounts are on an accrual basis, in practice converted from receipts and payments during the year.
- § The current account with HSBC and the deposit account with the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England.
- § The Hon. Membership Secretary operates membership and subscriptions and the Hon. Treasurer will work closely with them.
- § The Hon. Treasurer is responsible for bookkeeping, budgeting, Gift Aid, liaison with the Inland Revenue and Charity Commission, Annual Accounts.

The person appointed does not need to be qualified in accountancy, or be an accounting technician, however an understanding of accrual accounting is important. Enquiries are welcomed and will be kept confidential.

***Not so very long ago ...
Congratulations!***

....to CHRISM member Pat Wright, who was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday honours list, diplomatic and overseas section, for her services to HIV/AIDS work and education in Swaziland.

(An old acquaintance of mine worked in Mbabane for two years and told me the people and country are lovely. Thanks for your work Pat! Ed.)

At Work Together 2002 ...



... organised by Spring Harvest ... is taking place Sunday (evening) 3 – Wednesday (afternoon) 6 November in Eastbourne. Aimed at:

seeing your work from God's perspective,

CHRISM

CHRistians In Secular Ministry

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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