

Resourcing Mission

Some CHRISM Members will be aware of the current initiative in the Church of England called "Resourcing Mission", which seeks to identify the most effective ways in which to use the Church's pool of people and funds. The Resourcing Mission Group is chaired by The Right Reverend Peter Price, and the letter reproduced below has been sent in response to his invitation (in 'The Church Times') to submit contributions to the work of the Group. Felicity Smith, as Presiding Moderator, has signed the letter on behalf of CHRISM and it is proper that members know what has been said on our behalf. Thanks on behalf of all the Committee are due to Adrian Holdstock, who drafted the response so well.

Dear Bishop Peter,

"CHRISM" (Christians in secular Ministry) is the body that represents "MSEs" across the denominations in the UK. "MSEs" are Ministers in Secular Employment and may be lay or ordained. CHRISM's management team observed your letter in the Church Times and we wish to contribute to your reflections on resourcing mission. We believe that CHRISM and the MSE concept we represent have an important contribution to make to your two specific aims: to achieve equitable distribution of financial and [especially] other resources across the Church; and to facilitate local mission objectives and plans.

In this letter we have assembled our views under three questions: What are MSEs? Where do mission and the MSE concept meet? How can MSEs add value to mission?

What are MSEs?

MSEs are Christians who recognise they are living out their Christian lives and values in the world of work. We regard "work" as including both paid and unpaid work, both formal and less formal voluntary work. We value creation and we regard work as created for humans with the potential to dignify humans as well as contribute to society and God's world. We value work and workplaces as providing opportunities for human relationships, where people may find a sense of identity, dignity and belonging.

A good summary of the MSE concept is given in the enclosed brochure produced by CHRISM. It is worth noting that our membership includes a broad spectrum of MSEs and those considering whether they are MSEs. We include those seeking formal training, perhaps towards ordination, and others who have fulfilled a lifetime of paid work and may now be contributing more to ministry in the work of retirement!

MSEs, then, are both representative of and counter-cultural to local church congregations. We are lights for Christ shining "abroad," out in the world. We are a "frontier" ministry, distinctive from, but complementary to, the Parish or other Church structure. We encounter God and people where they meet in the busy-ness of worldly life. We experience that busy-ness, its joys, its pains, its frustrations from the inside, resulting in a rich diversity of encounters with God's world and humankind. As a consequence, CHRISM would not attempt to specify a "position," a right way to be an MSE – but would seek to encourage MSEs and others to work out their ministry and theology as they go about their daily lives.

Where do mission and the MSE concept meet?

Mission is God's mission. It helps to think of mission as a process rather than an event. It also helps to think of God's mission being to communities and their processes rather than just to individuals. In that case, mission needs to happen within and amongst actual communities. Often, however, many communities are not touched by Parish ministry, and this is true even if some individuals from those communities "go to church." MSEs, on the other hand, are on the inside of many of these communities: MSEs can reach the parts of community life other activities of the churches cannot – the networks of working people and the places of work.

MSEs are able to perceive how their faith works out in the world. Rather than be bound by traditional forms of church, we experience and accept God's grace and the Holy Spirit's guidance to discover and recognise new ways of being Kingdom and Church in the midst of humanity and creation alongside the traditional church structures.

There is a sense in which wherever MSEs are then mission is underway. Because the individual MSE acknowledges that our own situation can appropriately be described as MSE, then we reflect on our work and relationships with an MSE mind-set. We identify with one or more of Christ's characteristics of prophet, priest and king as well as servant and shepherd. Both in the actual work we do, and the relationships we have with people met through work, we offer a prophetic comment on the work and its processes, its outcomes, and its impacts on society and the environment; we bring especial pastoral care (as should any sensitive line manager or colleague); and we provide the (kingly) leadership so often required in human organisations. Prophet, priest or king in work means mission in and through work. Above all, modelling our working lives on Christ as servant, we approach our work and relationships in work as servants with a missionary role.

Every church member has a share in God's mission to the world. If God starts a mission activity in the world of work, then MSEs will be there to indicate God's activity and support and serve God's purposes. But God has a much greater resource to apply to this mission. Many faithful people in congregations are incipient servants in the world of work: "closet MSEs"! They are an untapped resource of God's army in the world of work. Their every action and encounter could and should be an opportunity to serve God. MSEs have a teaching and preaching and encouraging role so that these people, our congregations, can recognise their advantage for God's mission to the world of work: they are already out there! All they need is equipping and coaxing to give life to mission and ministry where they work.

How can MSEs add value to mission?

MSEs have a wealth of experience of a sector of life where God's mission does function, can function or could function better. Sharing reflections on our experiences will add value, between MSEs, and from MSEs to all Christians, lay and ordained. CHRISM offers a central point for reflection through its quarterly magazine and two annual gatherings: a retreat and a conference week-end. CHRISM also encourages local MSE groups but does not specify specific local or regional structures. More could be done by the Churches to encourage ecumenical and cross-functional liaison and reflection on ministry and mission in the world of work.

Theological and mission-focussed training is a broad area where MSEs are significantly under-used. From universities through theological colleges and courses to local Continuing Ministerial Education, the MSE concept needs lights to be shone as beacons for people to consider their calling to serve God and whether that calling is not out of the world into the Church but into the world of work equipped for mission.

We do not perceive that MSEs are looking to be "organised" to deliver mission. We do not seek financial support - our calling is to be self-supporting, "tent-makers" like St Paul. On the other hand, our service of the Gospel should not be considered of less worth because it has not been Church funded. It is a worldly trait that undervalues anything which does not carry a price tag. Nevertheless, should funds be available then MSEs may be able to support more directly the work of the Church in its mission strategy e.g. liaising with DDOs and theological colleges and producing theological material and training courses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we do feel strongly that the Church's strategy for mission should be inclusive of MSEs, both as a resource and as a source of theological reflection, both in the world and to the Church. We suggest that dioceses should be encouraged to recognise and support MSE as part of their overall

strategy for ministry and mission and facilitate this by appointing a Dean or Warden of MSE (who would themselves be a MSE) to the diocesan team.

We would welcome the opportunity for CHRISM to be considered for further consultation by your Group.