

Ministers-at-Work

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secular ministry*

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Editorial

This edition is pretty well packed with material from the meeting of the European Worker Priests in June in Manchester. Not everything is here, but a selection to pick up commonalities and differences across the group. The focus of much of the work discussed is being with people at the boundaries and the left behind.. Migration – whether as a result of war or poverty - and its consequences continues to have a major impact across all countries. There is a major task for us in dealing with people's fears of difference. How can we, as ministers in secular employment / environments, be prophetic among such people? Globalisation is destroying taken for granted structures, leading to short termism and a reduction in meaningful work. Information technology – and technology in general – raise questions about power, truth, and surveillance – and the potential for dehumanizing day to day life. But we are also reminded that we are not coming to bring something, we are coming to share life... And that such sharing should encompass all aspects of life. Lots for each of us to ponder..

Dorrie Johnson also contributes a thought provoking piece about the language we use as MSEs – and whether our task is interpretation rather than splashing in puddles. Finally we have details of our forthcoming conferences – get those dates in your

diary! – and two book reviews: the prices are not dissimilar – but one is exceptional value!

Next quarter's journal will focus on two questions: what would you describe as 'good' work? And then – what is 'work' anyway? Please put your thoughts on either or both on paper and send them to me before the AGM!

Pauline Pearson



International Meeting of Worker Priests, Manchester, June 2018



Incarnation

People first

Living with - in all its fragility

*How can the crisis be fruitful for
the Kingdom?*

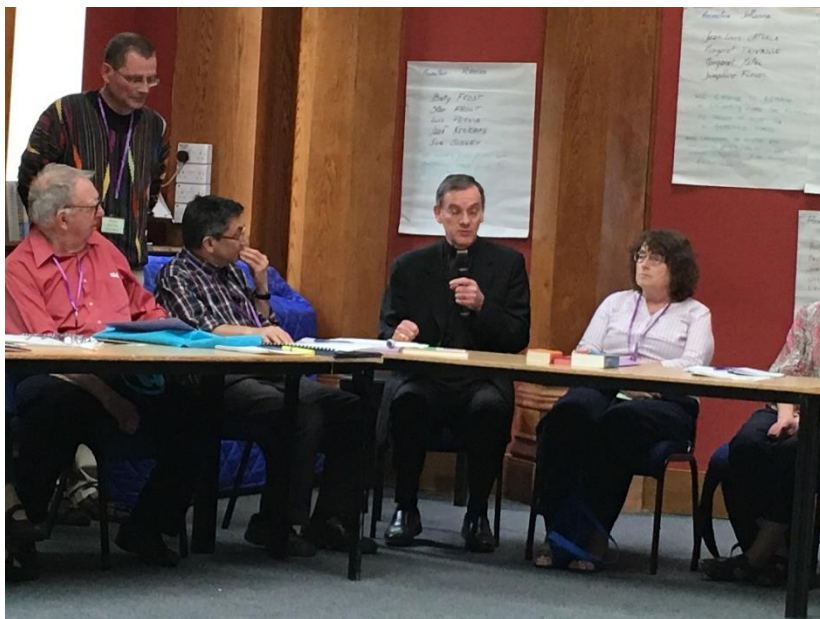
*We choose to remain in
solidarity among the people as
seeds of hope for a renewed
world*

*We don't fight for a flag, but for
justice*



Above – the group talking together. Below the visit to Holy Innocents, Fallowfield where we learnt about the support the church gives to Iranian refugees in the congregation - and had a wonderful lunch prepared by a group of them.





Welcome from the Bishop of Salford

“I am pleased to welcome all attending the Worker Priests’ of Europe meeting here in Manchester. The witness of the worker priests is an example of the Gospel being lived in practical and generous ways – as urged by Pope Francis. We must continue to develop the witness to the Gospel in the world in which we live, and in the work that we do, as ambassadors of Christ. The world needs to see the practical impact of Gospel values, and Pope Francis reminds us of our individual calling to be “missionary disciples”. I hope that the meeting will prove to be a great success and encouragement for all attending.”

International Meeting of Worker Priests, June 2018 Paper from England

The tradition of the Worker Priests: where are we today?

For us, the Worker Priest tradition speaks of engagement in the world of work and especially in those forms of work which are the most fragile and precarious. We have learnt the words: “être-avec” “to be with” as the most important phrase – to put ourselves under the same conditions of work as everyone else and with everyone else. During the 20th century this work was, for the most part, concentrated in large businesses: factories, mines, dockyards etc. But now we observe two important developments: firstly, changes in the forms and conditions of work towards increased insecurity and under contracts which are temporary, part-time and individual; and secondly, an understanding among the Worker Priests that the “monde ouvrier” includes all those who are at the boundary, such as immigrants and the people and areas which are forgotten, “the left behind”. And many of the Worker Priests in retirement have devoted themselves to the poorest and most excluded.

Politically (Regionalism / Nationalism)

During our Reflective Weekend in England in February, we spoke about “Brexodus”. Ex 17.3: But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?’ Then Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.’

We understand the important difference for the Worker Priests between the two words regionalism and nationalism – and all the bad connotations for the word nationalism for many of the

countries of Europe. But in the UK we speak of the nationalism of the Scots or of Wales – these are our movements for the freedom of different countries.

But on the other hand, many UK citizens have chosen to leave the EU for difficult reasons: they want fixed and controlled borders, and they want to throw out those who are not from “our country”. In Ex 1.10 we have read about the fear of the Egyptians when faced with the foreigners, a fear generated when they had forgotten their history and their former relationships, and were faced with the power of the rulers who had manipulated the people – finally, so that they throw the young boys into the river.

This leads us to the questions: how can we, as Worker Priests, be prophetic among such people? How can we hear the fears of others? And where can we find them in order to speak with them?

Phil spoke of two young friends, in their early twenties, from his neighbourhood. They had voted to leave the EU with a very narrow vision. Their reasons? – one had said “for the benefit of my son”. He is against immigrants but he has many friends who are migrants and he works happily with Polish women.

Socioeconomically (Rights and Social Exclusion)

During several of our group conferences in England we have discussed the huge changes taking place in our work and in society. We have spoken of the new conditions which influence the context of our work: Globalisation, Pluralism, Individualism, De-institutionalism. We have talked about the changes in the form of work: traditional salaried, consultancy and self-employment, Portfolio working (and insecurity). We would like to give some examples:

Sue said: I remain employed in a large insurance firm. I work in an office with other colleagues, and in a network with colleagues in other offices within our firm. So I am in a community among others and we can talk together and between us. But we must always work under the working conditions of the firm, within a framework constructed by other management levels, and we are always the victims of decisions taken at a distance. There are sometimes major reorganisations (for example when the management decides to close one of our offices) but on the other hand, there is some continuity and a sense of belonging.

Phil said: I was made redundant in October 2015, but I have continued working for the safety of high hazard industries (chemicals, oil and gas etc.) for several different clients. I now work as a self-employed consultant, always independent – I no longer have colleagues, an office, a community. But I arrive in an office of a client and I work with people I do not know. We have to work together for perhaps only one or two weeks - it is necessary to understand very quickly the people and their ways of working (and their chemical processes). But we manage and grow the relationships between us. And I must always cultivate the relationships with the clients and their management to acquire further work.

Wendy said: I am working under a Zero Hours Contract for a charity where I write policies and solve problems. It is not well paid, but I have chosen to do it because, currently, I do not need a regular income. This gives me some benefits: I only work when needed, the charity does not have to pay me when there is nothing to be done, and if on one day I do not want to work, that's down to me. This works because of the trust between the organisation and me: if I work at home, I simply note the hours worked; because I do not have to travel to the office, I have more time for work (and for domestic jobs); and the charity benefits from my experience without paying too much. If I were to become a consultant, working under a fixed contract, we would have other costs (such as insurance). So - I am happy to work in this way.

This, again, leaves us with two questions: firstly, how ought we, in the tradition of the Worker Priests, to enter into the current forms of work, to continue “to be with”, accepting the same conditions and contracts (or lack of contracts) as others? And secondly: how can we speak of our ministry there, above all in those situations which are temporary and mobile, in a language that the church can understand?

Religion and Spirituality (Liberation and Oppression)

In our meetings with the European Worker Priests we are always reminded of the breadth of the Kingdom of God, discovered in all the small corners of this world and among people of different cultures, languages and faiths. The energy and the faith of the Worker Priests have given us the inspiration to engage with God to build the new world of his Kingdom – and the realisation of the importance of seizing every opportunity to make this possible.

But how are we to continue with the same vision? We recall the Mission Statement of CHRISM: “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”. We have discussed another image from the book of Exodus: the Burning Bush (Ex 3:2) – when we stop to look for the presence of God and what God has done. When we slow down, we shall be more able to see – and we shall be able to see differently.

In England many Ministers in Work are under considerable pressure from their church authorities to be involved with the local church. This pressure can become an oppression – the need to work in the church while at the same time doing what is necessary for daily work and family life. But the English churches say that they need

more unpaid ministers to support the life of local churches in the 21st century.

There is always the temptation “to be the minister” among the church members – it’s a question of status; and there is also a temptation to be seen as the minister in the office or place of work. But such temptations are madness! We want to speak of a spirituality of “presence” – to be with our colleagues and those around us who are excluded and left behind.

Many of us in the English group (as in the other countries) are becoming older. This raises important questions: what can one continue to do in retirement? And how can we identify and encourage younger ministers who continue in their secular employment to participate in our groups and in this movement of the Kingdom of God?

We hope:

- That the tradition and the understanding of the Worker Priests (“l’intuition PO”) will continue in the hearts of young men and women.
- That the Churches will understand and endorse vocations to a life of engagement in the “monde ouvrier”
- To find ways to revive solidarity between those who are split apart by insecurity, in order to build a new life together
- To fight against the resentments and the fears that we hear around us in our daily life
- That “another world is possible” Que « une autre monde est possible »



French contribution for the international meeting of Worker Priests in Manchester (June 2018)

Some of us, on the occasion of the meeting in Montreuil of the POAP (Worker Priests in Professional Employment) addressed ourselves to the following question: where do we place ourselves with regard to “Worker Priests by tradition” or “Worker Priests by intuition”

When the first Worker Priests (WPs) went out to work, it was to evangelize, that is to say they went with the idea of meeting men and women and it was necessary to announce the Good News of Jesus; and then, the rather important fact, which was to say: they are already living something of the Spirit in their solidarity, in their courage, in their comradeship at work in the organizations. And then there was the realization: Jesus Christ is not going to be declared to them, because they are already living him! I wonder if that step is still the work today and which is relevant today. In sharing

people's lives, we are walking together and learning with them to discover the signs of humanity which are considered as gifts of Spirit. We are not coming to bring something, we are coming to share life...

This transforms the idea of mission or of evangelization: it is not a rejection, but the discovery of another dimension. The experience of the WPs makes us discover that: one thinks that it is important that the Good News is proclaimed but one declares that it takes routes which are a bit different and unexpected.

The experience of the WPs shows that it is not the intellectual content that we are going to bring to others who do not know this content. The positioning of the WPs, is to say, by witness, by life, by companionship, by solidarity, by actions and not by discussion. I think that the richness of the WP intuition is truly to say that language is something other than verbiage, something other than words. For me, the best words that I have received are from my work colleagues when they say "a priest like you, I would join immediately"; "a pope who finally tries to come out a little from his golden palace, that interests me...". These are the little words sent like this which say firmly that evangelizing is not primarily about words but about attitudes.

The history of the WPs is like a sharp reminder for the Church, a reminder that she is there to be alongside the humble, the poor; I think I have understood there was that stop in 54, it was not initially because the WPs were in the

communist party, but because they desacralized the tridentine ministry and that, in doing so, they were saying something about a Church which would give up the separation between secular and sacred; a Church which truly wanted to be with the people.

The WP intuition is a Church which takes seriously the incarnation as the way of salvation. Incarnation is the valuing of humanity in all its history, in all its tangled ways, in its desire for freedom. If the Church passes by on the other side, evangelization is disconnected.

“To be with”? Me, I would say, to live with! I find that it is something else to live with people. To live the conditions of work, that is nothing; it is a life choice made in the name of Jesus Christ and one must not forget that it is in the name of someone and that it is not simply because one wants to go to work. Sent by my Church, in mission on behalf of my bishop. I find that it is important to say that it is not only the business of the WPs to live this incarnation. It is also the business of the whole Christian community, and even more broadly it is also the business of work colleagues; the other day someone spoke to me about prayer: you pray yourself and you pray for us; there are 100,000 places of Christian worship and at any one time something of the Gospel is revealed through the sharing of bread, the sharing of wine. I find that this is the basis for spirituality. It is perhaps also something to work around the spirituality of our ministry, how this life is lived, it has the flavour of the Gospel and how it feeds us. To let

oneself be detained by the word of the other. Evangelization goes in two directions. We can have a word which opens the heart of the other but the other must also have a word which opens our own heart. I like very much the Gospel passage about Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman, he lets himself be changed by a woman, who is also a Gentile! There is something which is transformed in us.

With regard to to live with, I think I remember that in liberation theology, it is said, if I am not mistaken, that sharing the condition of the poor is based on the fact of denouncing the condition of the poor as bad; I would not go that far, because that takes away the whole dimension of joy of sharing people's lives. It is also there that one has found something of the happy simplicity of the Gospel.



Contribution from the German Delegation

The tradition of the Worker-Priests – where are we today?

- Politically (regionalism and nationalism)
- Socio-economically (rights and social exclusion)
- Religion and spirituality (liberation and oppression)
- What are our experiences and our hopes, for ourselves and in our groups?

In the past:

For more than 75 years some priests, lay people and men and women religious have chosen to live with a particular perspective: as believers daring to move away from their social class and life environment and adopting a critical attitude both to the middle-class church and to capitalist society. During this period the institutional church exerted control over every aspect of the life of the faithful (this was before Vatican II). France and wider Europe were in the grip of war and fascism. The arrival of mass production, standardisation, mass consumerism, the development of vast industries and the socio-economic system this engendered (known as 'fordism') transformed society, giving it the characteristics of what Marx labelled a 'class-based society'.

In our time:

While those of us who are older may still be moulded in that tradition, our younger colleagues (in respect of their age and

participation) are flagging up cracks and dislocations that are beginning to show. For example:

- The information society is steadily destroying the industrial complexes which used to structure day-to-day life and political activity.
- Globalisation is having an unprecedented level of competition on the labour market: it ruins the social skills and knowledge obtained through training and remuneration, leading to insecurity and fragmentation of work and of employment in general.
- 'Macho' social classes and ecclesiastical structures are withering.
- An anti-consumerist spirituality which is respectful of the environment and enables the choice of a radical lifestyle is of growing importance, while at the same time the social and moral teaching of the church is losing its relevance.
- The demographic changes which are linked to massive immigration into Germany and western Europe are raising new questions about religion and values.

Today:

In this context, it is virtually impossible to define the ruling elements of our identity as a group. It is equally difficult to enumerate all our life activities. Some of us have opted for factory work and have stuck to this for more than twenty years. Others have become the victims of globalisation and maximisation of profit; they have been sacked or the

undertaking they worked for has been closed down. They have found third-sector employment, in commerce, catering, hospital work, domestic care or similar. Others have become involved – sometimes for years – with the victims of globalisation. Yet others are trying one form or another of (pseudo) self-employment. Sometimes they do not choose the work but are compelled to do it to provide for their basic needs. And an increasing number of us have retired.

What do we want?

A large number of us, who are rooted in an ecclesiastical, theological and spiritual narrative, still want to have work which is as basic as possible. Beyond work, that objective extends to the way in which we function in our neighbourhood and overall life, living among a great diversity of people (refugees, work colleagues, etc.), as well as in our communal and political involvement. To have contact with immigrants and struggle in solidarity with them for recognition and lasting respect for their rights remains an important value. Similarly, and increasingly, we are involved at parish level and with church organisations. Our current choices are less directed against the Church and society than in the past; they derive from each individual's personal journey and spirituality. They can change, and are not settled once and for all.

Regionalism – Nationalism:

In the same way that the arrest of Carlos Puigdemont in Germany has suddenly plunged the country into the

Catalonian conflict, so above all we experience regionalism as the increasing power of right-wing parties, which is increasingly influential as one moves eastwards. The apparently inexorable increase in strength of the AFD (Alternative for Germany) is a real threat. This is the revival of a society which doesn't just wear the trappings of racism but preaches hatred, rejection of the outsider and the resort to violence (particularly military) as a moral and political imperative. From this point of view an exceptionally negative sign has been the naming, for the first time, of a barracks after a soldier killed in an overseas operation.



Other gulfs are visible in society: between refugees and indigenous people, between Germans and Muslims, between those who have unemployment protection (the Hartz IV laws) and those in unprotected jobs, between western and eastern Europe, between Russia and the west. Not to mention the wage gap, which is extreme in Germany, or the economic and social under-development and plundering of countries and

entire continents, or military interventions, with or without a UN mandate, to protect 'German interests' across the world.

Social exclusion:

We are experiencing fractures at all levels of mutual existence, national and international. The whole idea of peace and solidarity on a global scale, which was always present in our meetings in the 1980s, has all but vanished. If it survives at all, it is at the very personal level of relationships at work, with our neighbours or in the local community; that is where our encounters sometimes allow us to bridge the gaps which divide us. But how are we to develop a vision with that as a starting point?

Church and spirituality:

Since the 1980s our group, which was mostly male and clerical, has been fighting against the Roman Catholic Church, identified as the bourgeois opponent. Ever since then it has been very difficult to regard the institutional church as the source of a spiritual force which should feature in each person's existence. When one has to position oneself between personal conviction and interfaith possibilities, it is no longer a matter of course to understand oneself as a Christian. The question of contact with Muslim communities and their representatives very rarely comes up in our discussions. All the same, when we do talk about belief, we demonstrate an interest in an open and liberating faith which transcends discrimination and separation.

What still remains?

Currently most of us are not bothered about the idea of living in the worker-priest tradition with an ecclesial/spiritual pathway; what does continue for us at a personal level should be an enriching experience, a fulfilling lifestyle, an impetus to seek new ways; to oppose consumerism, globalisation and racism; to work for a more just and supportive international and social order.

When we come together for mutual support and a brief period of conviviality it is always both a risk and a stimulating challenge, preventing us from becoming too turned-in on ourselves and making us take a broader view.

Text prepared by the Dutch-speaking Belgians

How it used to be, and how it is now in the political, socio-economic, religious and spiritual spheres. By way of introduction we quote from 'De Jihadkaravaan', by Montasser Alde'emeh.

'the time at which, on the one hand, we are commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War and fifty years of Islam in Belgium and Holland, and on the other hand are ripening the conditions for a third world war, even if that shows itself differently from the first two. European colonisation of the Middle East after the First World War. Creation of the State of Israel in Palestine. Bringing, on our own initiative, a Muslim

workforce into Europe. Western intervention and support for Middle-Eastern dictators. The importation to Europe of ultra-conservative Saudi teaching. The influx of migrants from Muslim countries to Europe. Right-wing populists campaigning against Islam. The war in Syria and the jihadi fight to restore the caliphate, the appearance of Syrian fighters in Europe, the recent outrages. All these are manifestations of the same conspiracy: to return to the past by increasing violence, war, hatred, prejudice and polarisation.

The way forward for the future is the way of justice and reconciliation.'

The political sphere

After the Second World War state and government leaders met in conference to avoid repetition of similar bloodbaths and destruction and drafted the Declaration of Human Rights. But our ministers grumbled about these rights, and approved laws which permitted deportation and the ability to raid a house with a search warrant, even when those who lived there had not committed any offence. Nationalism and isolationism got a following wind: Brexit, Catalonia, Corsica, Italy, Flanders and Wallonia, 'America First'.

The socio-economic sphere

In the past people gave each other much mutual support, encouraged by the Church. Now the capitalist system has gained a greater and greater hold on society, and that solidarity has crumbled. There is growing individualism: if someone does not succeed or has problems, it's their own

fault. This is not a firm basis on which to live as a community. Multi-national companies are more powerful than governments. Time was when the economy was at the service of the people; now people are at the service of the economy. An example of a strike at Volvo: seven workers were immediately sacked and the others dared not fight back.

The religious and spiritual dimensions

In the past the Church was a strong link which bound people together. The mass, the processions, the village fairs, the youth organisations – doubtless also because there were few other possibilities. Now there is a very different reality and a complete absence of young people. The Church misses many opportunities on which its voice should be heard, for example on the issue of South Sudan. The Church has demolished liberation theology and restricted the base communities. It has condemned Marxism but never capitalism. These days the institutional Church has lost most of its clout.

The spirituality of the worker-priests has remained the same, that is: to follow Jesus in sharing the lives of the insignificant and the oppressed. In the past they did this by living among them and sharing the same work. Now most of us have retired, but we continue to stand in solidarity with unskilled workers, the unemployed, people from the fourth world¹, refugees and illegal immigrants.

¹ The term "Third World" has been used to refer to all poor countries, the least developed countries and developing countries. In this spirit, the

Today we live in a culture of fear, fuelled by five major problems which afflict us:

- Migration: there are now 65 million migrants. Where are they to go? How will this difficulty be resolved?
- Global warming: caused for the most part by the 'civilised' world.
- Automation and artificial intelligence: increasingly taking work not just from the unskilled workforce but from people who are highly-qualified.
- The continuing sweep of digitisation and many people's fear of being overtaken and excluded from society.
- Where will we find the money to counteract all these challenges?

These problems confront us every day in the media and in our neighbourhoods. Because of these fears everyone (at every level, whether individual, regional or country-wide, rich and poor) tries to protect the rights and possessions they have acquired, while sharing and community spirit become less and less evident. We must put pressure on our governments to sit at the same table with people from other political parties and with different visions, people from other countries and continents, and work together to find solutions to the big problems. It will require other efforts to build a society in which the rights of the weakest take priority, where justice

"Fourth World" (proposed by Joseph Wresinski in 1969) refers to the most disadvantaged segment of the population, not having the same rights as the others, and existing in all countries, rich or poor

and peace reign – in short, to share in building the Kingdom of God.

Are there no signs of hope?

Of course there are! Think of all the initiatives taken by individuals which, despite opposition, are acts of protest, for example: taking refugees into their own homes. Or the ‘welcoming communities’ which have announced that they will not enforce some discriminatory legislation. Some citizens and organisations evince a great deal of goodwill: politicians in power should support them, not thwart them. Insofar as we are a truly humane community we must learn to move from compassion to solidarity. The word ‘spirituality’ has the same meaning for us as for Charles de Foucauld: to take the option for the poor, to make their way ours, and also to take actions to drive greater social cohesion. Jesus’ message in the Beatitudes shows us a way of living which is humane and life-enhancing even for those who are of least account. Just maybe



we have managed to broadcast a tiny seed here or there which is germinating and beginning to grow – we’ll see!

Contribution from The Netherlands *Anne-Marieke Kloot*

It gives me great pleasure to share a contribution with you. We have a different situation here. A worker-priest tradition does exist: in the 1990s some priests were active in factories and ports. During my theological studies and when I was working as a factory chaplain I read articles about their factory work. But in 2002 when I left the chaplaincy to take an unskilled job as a home-help there was no trace of active worker-priests. I was able to make contact with the German 'Arbeitergeschwister' group and become part of this. The priests who worked in factories functioned, in general, as chaplains. I had no contact with them and did not know them.

I do value the tradition of Dutch and Flemish worker priests. Egied Van Broekhoven's 'Friendship Journal' is very important for me. I belong to, and identify with the narrative of the Arbeitergeschwister. None-the-less, I'm telling my own story here – The Netherlands is a different country from Germany. This is not a fundamental analysis; it's a personal reflection.

Who am I?

Who or what guides me? To whom or to what do I want to be faithful? Whom do I want to serve? These are important questions when I am reflecting and searching for my own identity. I feel strongly connected to the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld (founder of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters). This has one central key word: simplicity. I try to live simply, in

a small house in an ordinary neighbourhood, spending modestly, doing an ordinary job (as a home-help for elderly and sick people), trying to take care of my neighbours, my locality, my friends and family. I don't take things to extremes. I take account of my physical limitations, and I also enjoy myself – at a concert, for example. I try to do everything attentively and with care. I'm not someone who will get into a fight; it suits me much better to discuss and reflect on issues with other people. By living and working in this way I hope to represent something to the people I meet every day.

What does all this mean in The Netherlands?

The Netherlands is a relatively SMALL country. There are differences between the regions but none of them wants independence. Friesland has its own language, and its inhabitants are proud of it. Certainly some substantial groups of people are demonstrating their fear of foreigners. The right-wing parties are benefiting from this.

The Netherlands is a RICH country, but there are wide income gaps. More and more people need several jobs to make both ends meet (the poor workers!) The elderly are becoming increasingly lonely. Social care standards are deteriorating.

I'd like to mention some political and social changes which have consequences for political strategy, for socio-economic planning and, I think, also for the spiritual dimension.

- a) Decentralisation. Many more of the provisions on which the rural economy depends are becoming municipal responsibilities. This includes support for the young and the elderly, home help, policing, transport, well-being, and policies for tackling poverty. As a result there are huge differences between towns: a 90-year-old can have help at home in one town but not in another. The level of financial support varies from town to town.
- b) Participation in society. Work which used to be carried out by professionals is now expected to be done by people themselves. People are asked to help and to co-operate, for example as unpaid assistants in schools, healthcare, social services and for families and neighbours.
- c) Fragmentation and dispersal. Within politics and in the most recent local elections, it is increasingly the local parties which take the majorities and win the elections. The traditional parties of left and right are dissolving. In many towns the municipal council has four or more parties represented on it!
- d) Digitalisation. Almost imperceptibly the world has become computerised. I don't think there is any point in wanting to push back this irreversible change. The big questions: Who benefits from this? How can we protect our data? Who is driving these changes? Who has the power? How do we stay in control? In what ways are we becoming vulnerable and dependent? How can we distinguish truth from falsehood? Knowledge is now available to everyone over

the internet, but which individuals and groups do not have access (a new exclusion)? Are we aware of the environmental impact? How much energy is required to keep people always on-line? In north-east Groningen, Google has put up huge buildings to house vast server farms. How do we counter the addiction of those who are slaves to social media?

- e) The environment and sustainable development. This is an increasingly important theme. It was clear from the last elections that the Reds have been pushed aside by the Greens. The new left has turned Green and the traditional workers' parties (Parti du Travail, Parti Socialiste) have lost supporters.
- f) Loneliness. This is a serious problem. Visits are made to everyone who is 75 or older, at least once a year.



- g) A tight market for jobs. Workers in education and health services are becoming increasingly impoverished (workplace stress is increasing and the work is badly paid).

There is a growing need for professionals as well as for plumbers, painters etc.

- h) Individualisation. The Church and other membership associations are dwindling. People don't belong to such institutions any more.

How do I experience all these developments?

I am concerned by the way the situation in The Netherlands is evolving. The divide between rich and poor continues to grow. I think we are insufficiently aware of the immense changes which are affecting the environment. Nor do we take sufficient account of the fact that the struggles, the violence and the wars in the Middle East, as well as in Africa and elsewhere in the world are inextricably linked to our hunger for riches and prosperity.

But I am not without hope. I can see many small, hopeful stirrings: concern for a co-operative and fairer economy; concern for sustainability. I don't sense any major groundswell; I don't think that exists at the moment. But there are small groups with which I feel comfortable – people who can discuss these issues together; theologians who inspire me. As the world becomes bigger and bigger, I look for local neighbourhood links. In a world becoming ever more sophisticated, I look for simplicity and thrift. In a world where news travels ever further and faster I search for depth of meaning and time to consider. In the place I live, work and have my being I look for the way I can trust, knowing that a small step taken with others can become something big – like

the mustard-seed. From that beginning, built on alertness and attention, GOOD will rise.

Manchester: Reflections from Mario Signorelli – Italy



The Worker-Priest tradition and its position today

In the context of the years from 1960-1990 our experience has been prophetic. This was the period of the Second Vatican Council, and also of the decline of the Church. Now Christianity is in crisis, together with the churches and particularly the entire structure of the Catholic Church which had built up over the last centuries. Our way of being was a gust of fresh air, forcing us to leave the temple to listen to people and share their life, getting our hands dirty and ‘the

smell of the sheep in our nostrils', as Francis, bishop of Rome, said.

That season, at least in Italy, is coming to an end. Only a few of us remain, mostly over 70 years old. Three are still working; the others have retired. Of the three, Luca has chosen to emigrate, along with more than 400,000 other young Italians who have left the country in the last few years in search of work.

Our way of being church is to share it with people. The church does not employ us. This leads us to envisage a future for the Christian community without paid clergy, without any distinction between priests and laity, where we are all lay people living by the work of our hands, and where everyone, man and woman, has a role in the community which matches their gifts. It is only at the point where the seed dies that new birth happens.

Today a few Italian worker-priests are still struggling to engage with the immigrants in the districts where they live. They are few because some no longer have the energy for this. Three have died in the last year. Many of us are asked to speak in church and social groups, because our experience and our testimony can stimulate discussions about faith in today's social context.

Political (regionalism and nationalism)

Except in rare cases, the workers' struggle has disappeared from public view; no-one is talking about this. The last general

election in Italy made it clear that the electoral climate has changed. The Left is disappearing – four years ago it won 40% of the vote, but now 19% is usual. When this grouping ought to be united it splits, because it can't find a way of talking about and dealing with the real problems in the country; it traditionally works within the parameters of 'us' and 'ours' rather than from the point of view of those who are excluded. It is more like a struggle for power than a concern for mutual thriving. There is a difficulty with dialogue – it is 'win or lose'. If you lose, you are outside the group and you won't co-operate with it. Two parties have won, but they don't have an overall majority. The Left has lost. The winners, two populist parties, are not listening to each other. The larger one has been negotiating with the Left and together they would have a majority, but as usual the Left is divided. It is clearly the right time for projects which look to the future, not for election manifesto promises which are blown away by the first breeze.

Socio-economic (rights and social exclusion)

The amount of work is increasing but its quality is not – the weak growth is in employment on insecure contracts. The employment rate is higher than for the last 40 years, having risen by 345,000 in just one year. But the growth in employment results almost entirely from short-term contracts (450,000 – 497,000 in 2017) and the work is in the less-skilled sectors (rentals, travel agencies, care services, state agents, hospitality, building maintenance). Italy and Greece are the only European markets where the upturn has not led to

growth in high-skilled professions (e.g. technology and science). These time-limited contracts, running from one month to the next, lead to instability and insecurity. You are only required when the business needs you, not on a regular basis. You cannot plan your time, your life or your future. You're not a person, merely a number.

Religion and spirituality (liberation and oppression)

Spirituality must lead us towards humanity, to a society where everyone can live in peace. Spirituality fights to eliminate injustice. It brings us out of the temple to meet Christ in humankind, notwithstanding our ideas and beliefs. The Gospel takes no notice of whether someone is red, white or black, but explains itself in these words: 'I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink'. Spirituality focuses on people's faces, not on their rituals, holy places or doctrines. Spirituality also empathises with creation, in love for the earth and the environment which we have destroyed. Human rights and the rights of the earth are reunited.

'Do you know that trees talk? Yes, they talk. They talk to each other and they will talk to you if you know how to listen to them. But the white man doesn't hear them. As for me, I've learned a lot from the trees, sometimes something about the weather, or about animals, or about the Great Spirit. Hills are always more beautiful than stone houses. In a large town you are reduced to an artificial existence. People scarcely feel the real earth beneath their feet, they only see trees growing in tubs, and they rarely leave the street lights behind

to discover the magic of a night sky spangled with stars. When people live so far away from everything that the Great Spirit has made, they easily forget his laws.’ (Tatanga Mani, American Indian.)

What are our experiences and hopes, for ourselves and in our teams?

There is a story of an old man whose neighbour saw him digging holes in his garden and asked what he was doing. The old man replied: ‘I’m planting mango trees’. The neighbour said: ‘Are you sure you’ll get to eat any of the fruit? It will be a long time before there is any on those trees.’ The old man said: ‘All my life I’ve eaten mangoes from trees that other people planted. Now I’m acknowledging that by planting for the people who will come after me.’

Throughout our lifetime we have learned from other people, especially those with whom we have shared our lives, our work and our social and community activities. We have continued to travel along a path opened up by others, gaining much experience along the way. We haven’t eaten fruit from trees we planted. The pips don’t stay in the fruit to dry out; they must be put into the soil. Most of us haven’t done great things or been involved with grand plans; we’ve done the little things: listening to people, being there in our neighbourhoods or local groups, supporting them when they undertake community actions. They derive inspiration and energy from the presence of people who have consecrated their entire lives to the pursuit of justice. It is a powerful witness. We have

again become the tiny pips, fallen from the fruit we have eaten in past years.



Above: Most (but not all) of the group on Sunday morning
Below: worshipping together... each in our own tongue..



How many doctrinal puddles have you stepped into today? - *Dorrie Johnson*



A second question - why do many ministers in secular employment slip into being theologically bilingual instead of becoming an interpreter?



When I was given the privilege of being able to consider myself a minister in secular employment (MSE) I was also handed the invisible responsibility of working out just what that meant in practice. Although they have many attributes in common I had to differentiate it from the responsibility given to chaplains, for example, employed by a service - hospital, prison, police - to specifically practise a faith ministry in their place of work. The MSE is primarily in the work situation to fulfil his or her commitments to that organisation and not to represent a 'church'. So, the question was, and still is, how does ministry express itself when an integral part of work and how is it fed back into the church, particularly when the MSE is the preacher? I would like to argue that the MSE or SSM has a seven-day week ministry, not a five-day week with a different church ministry at the weekend, even if the context changes.

I would like to stress this. I am now retired but I meet working people every day - postal workers, shop assistants, or less frequently, bin men, street cleaners, police or fire personnel, bus drivers, gardeners, window cleaners, leaflet, and parcel deliverers, caretakers - the list could go on. Some of these people may be members of congregations but how can they feel that God also loves the working part of their life if, in church, we ignore it; if we switch into a church-oriented attitude with churchy language that may be difficult to understand or to apply at a personal level, never mind in the workplace. Church words come naturally to church ministers - redemption, evangelism, sacrament, transgressions,

resurrection to name a few - but, I suggest, they need some translation or interpretation.

The MSE is one of the relatively few people to carry some church authorisation and straddle both scenes - church and working world. Many sermons seem to me to unpick the Gospel reading or one of the other readings without then considering its possible application in the place of work. It is useful to know what an original Greek word meant, it is useful to know that there may have been an uprising at that time and that is why the writer wrote as he (almost certainly he) did, but if a member of the congregation goes home with that knowledge but having no further clue about its relevance to his or her work an opportunity is lost. 'Ordinary working people' and their workplace needs, it seems to me, are rarely acknowledged as such in the church context.

I worked in the NHS. We had our own medically oriented language, our own jargon. To explain anything to patients or their carers, families, visitors, we had to use a different language. To practice a ministry in the workplace and to carry the insights of that ministry into church needs a translation facility or, at least, some interpreting provision, for concepts held by the church. Most often these opportunities may arise in the sermon slot.



Biblical stories about healing rarely, in my experience, lead on to discuss resurrection (new life) brought about by prostheses, by surgery, by antibiotics. Neither do I hear much about resurrection might mean to people living with long term disability, head injury, dementia. What constitutes new life? I am NOT talking about the get-out clause (which I have heard) which promotes spiritual healing (nothing wrong with that) as God's answer but ignores the fact the bodily healing was the hope of the prayer. Resurrection - new life - following trauma, bereavement, amputation does not pick up where it was left - it is to a new life, a different life. It may turn out to be fulfilling, contented, unexpected but it will be a different life. In disabling illness or ageing changes in daily experiences may be recurrent and demand repeated adjustments to a worsening state. Where does hope lie? How do our sermons address such issues?

A sermon based on the Good Samaritan story will offer opportunities for neighbourliness, for recognising other

people's need. What does it have to suggest about neighbourliness at work? Does it put forward ideas for co-operation rather than competition at work? Does it suggest that it could mean offering people the chance to promote a colleague's opportunities for advancement regardless of our own chances? Does it help to identify factors that might make our working environment 'sick'? Are we tempted to 'pass by on the other side' when we see unsafe or unethical practice? Does it help us to consider the effect of changing working practices that might damage employees or seek some amelioration? Does it demonstrate on-going concern, a willingness to be involved? Does it ask questions about mission statements and the relevance they have for all employees?

Jesus' disciples go fishing. Does our worship then remember the dangers inherent in present fishing conditions and consider the needs of lifeboat personnel, the fishing industries conflict, rise of sea levels, plastic in the sea, small communities dependent on home-grown fishing methods? Can it recognise the tension experienced by men and women whose livelihood is put at risk by danger or maybe dependent on decisions made far away from their daily experiences? Does it consider the effects of fishing quotas - good and bad? it might be noted that the disciples return to their work after encountering the risen Jesus.

Each year we keep Good Friday and most often follow this by celebrating Easter Sunday with appropriately chosen (church

based) liturgies. What about that day in between - Holy Saturday? The bereavement felt by the disciples, their loss of hope, their despair, disillusionment, bewilderment, bleakness. Fear is experienced, too, at all levels by bereaved parents, children who lose a parent or sister or brother, children whose teacher dies, or whose friends are killed.

Think, too, of people who lose their jobs with all the effect that will have on families or who are faced with a rent rise, maybe a failure of benefit which means they lose accommodation. Consider the feeling of helplessness, of vulnerability, when the job someone is doing is being well done but the firm closes. There is also the knock-on effect on all dependent firms, suppliers, traders who are tied to that decision, the anxiety, anger, fear, hopelessness, especially when others are dependent on that income. Examples are plentiful: BHS, House of Fraser, Carillion, Rolls Royce, Care Homes; How is this recognised in church?

Another church word is mercy. How does that translate in secular environments, in organisational speech, in the jargon of any particular corporation or company, in practice in the workplace? When a member of the workforce makes a mistake what response is made? Ownership of the mistake and apologies are expected. Depending on the severity and nature of the mistake some penalty may be necessary including dismissal but how is this managed? Is it possible to learn and understand the background of the transgressor? Would his or her motivation make a difference to the outcome? How

much punishment is retribution, how much shaped towards understanding and preventing that sort of mistake and showing clemency, compassion. It is rare outside the church to hear of redemption, tribunals don't talk of sin, of transgressions, of trespasses they talk of wrong doing, of fraud, of criminal activity. They may declare an accused person of not showing remorse - they don't speak of penitence. There are workplaces where the ethos is positive with a 'not to blame' culture. How do we address these questions to make our sermons relevant to people with experience in the workplace?



It may be that someone's secret desire is for promotion or for release from bullying or for time to complete an unfeasible task or not to be required to manage something dubious or illegal. He or she may be faced with a challenge to ethical beliefs. There may be no ready answers or parallels in biblical passages. But the acknowledgement of things in the workplace that are out of our control but need managing, needs recognition in church, offered, responded to and drawn from faith in work words - not church words.

Each year we keep Vocations Sunday which, unsurprisingly, is about potential church ministers. What about applauding the ongoing vocations of teachers, NHS staff, prison officers, crane drivers, artists, engineers, architects, fishermen, shop workers, artists, linguists ...? I realise that sometimes we do mark special days - Education Sunday (2nd Sunday in September), Church Action on Poverty (11.2.2018), Racial Justice Day (2nd Sunday in September), Sea Sunday (c. 8 July) and so on. Do we ignore peoples' occupations for the rest of the year? There are, of course, some churches which do affirm their members' vocations to their secular work. An MSE or SSM is equipped with the language of the work place. We can translate the church's concerns and biblical stories into a language that can resonate with the wide variety of occupations that congregations experience. If we don't know what those occupations are in our own churches - then shame on us.



I'm sometimes met with the claim that we do recognise working people when ill and put them onto the prayer list. With our understanding that intercessory prayer cannot always produce the result we might like, perhaps our prayers need to change. I don't mean we should stop bringing to God what matters to us but there is, I believe a caveat. Pray and it shall be granted unto you does

not mean you will be granted what you ask for. If someone is praying for rain for his garden as someone else is praying for sunshine for a fete in the same place at the same time, it must make things difficult even for an omnipotent God. We can bring the work place before God, however, ask for forgiveness on behalf of the institution, realise the terrible tensions that exist for whistle-blowers, for those who refuse to succumb to pressures for bribery, to recognise hardship and uncertainty, fear of loss of work and coping with changing patterns and pressure of work.

If we are trapped into using doctrinal language - dependent on the nature of each church (lower case c) with its possible connotation of teaching something rather than opening something up for understanding, we risk losing tremendous opportunities to witness. We also risk making the church irrelevant to many people². Thoughts of eschatology, righteousness, oblation, hermeneutics might excite some people, but I believe we need to translate such concepts into common-use words, to interpret them for those people in church who may not have been brought up with them, let alone understand them, but who seek something from the church service to help them in their working lives.

Dorrie Johnson

²CHRISM made an input to this at the July 2015 conference with work on the ABC of MSE.

Forthcoming Events

CHRISM Autumn Conference and AGM

Reinventing Ministry in Secular Employment

Guest speaker: Revd. John Lees

***Carrs Lane Church and Conference Centre,
Birmingham City Centre,***

Saturday, 22 Sept 2018, 10.30 to 16.30

(<http://carrslane.co.uk/>)

£30 (members and spouses); £35 (non-members)

Cost includes tea / coffee.

Bring your own lunch, or buy nearby

Grants may be available from your Church to cover all or part of the cost.

Many people feel a calling from God to minister but believe that the main centre for that calling is among the people they work alongside each day. The secular environment offers a place for discipleship and pastoral care.

How is this calling supported?

Come and explore the future of Ministry in Secular Employment with us at our annual conference in Birmingham, led by our speaker John Lees. The conference will include a short AGM.

About our Speaker

John has run church programmes on a wide range of topics including resilience, team and collaborative working, and leadership. He also works full-time as a career coach and author and has led workshops in a range of countries. He has written 13 books on work and careers including “How to Get a Job You Love.”

John serves as a Self-Supporting Minister in the Diocese of Exeter and is Bishop’s Officer for Self-Supporting Ministry, having worked for 10 years previously in the Diocese of Chester. He is the author of Self-Supporting Ministry, a Practical Guide (SPCK, 2018), which forms the basis of our exploration.

Next Spring – take some time out on our Reflective Weekend

**CHRISM Reflective Weekend 22nd - 24th February 2019
at Shepherds Dene, Riding Mill Northumberland NE44
6AF**

We shall be led in an exploration of Busking Theology and MSE by Jim Francis. He was for many years a lecturer (in New Testament Studies) at Sunderland University and served as a self-supporting minister in two parishes in the city. He is the co-author of the book Tentmaking. Perspectives on Self-Supporting Ministry.

For more information on the venue, please visit
www.shepherdsdene.co.uk

And, please book the date now...

‘Educating for mission in the world of work - where next?’

The Kingdom at Work Project and St. Peter’s Saltley Trust invite you to a consultation on Tuesday, October 9th 2018 from 10.45 to 3.30 at the Ark - St Laurence’s Church - Alvechurch, Worcestershire

The purpose of this event is to bring together representatives of bodies and agencies, and a number of committed individuals active in the faith and work field to address how the church can better support and equip lay people for ministry and mission in the world of work.

Book reviews

Self-supporting Ministry: A Practical Guide, John Lees, SPCK, 2018; £14.99

The book that many of us have been waiting for! Thank you, John.

The sub-title of this book is ‘a practical guide’ – and how true. Firstly, it is a guide for the self-supporting minister. It guides through the many issues which have come to light and been the subject of many a survey. It also roots SSM in history and provides a good context for this ministry. Secondly it is an excellent guide for the incumbent who may have an SSM as an Associate Minister. It provides explanation of the issues that might arise and a valuable template for a Working Agreement with guidance on the questions to address and why. Thirdly it is a practical guide for those who help discern the vocations of others. Outlining as it does the various paths that ordained

ministry might take. This book provides the detail on how a person might recognise a vocation to ministry without the stipend and parsonage that is so often associated with clerical orders.

Throughout the book a question is addressed which continually comes to the forefront of discussion – ‘lack of pay is not the defining or most important aspect of SSM ministry... SSMs support themselves because they can...’ The book asks questions such as ‘What do SSMs do?’, ‘should SSMs be treated differently?’, ‘did we get the SSMs the Church originally had in mind?’. Questions are asked and answered and each chapter includes valuable case studies contributed by real SSMs willing to share their experience. This helps make the book a substantial support for all in this ministry. John discusses the context of ministry. He explores the issues around the different or changing contexts into which an SSM may be called, different perhaps to the stipendiary priest whose context is well known at the time of ordination. How the contexts for SSMs might be broader, living most probably outside the parish in which they are licensed but also perhaps forming part of chaplaincies, or even workplaces. This book looks at the strengths required, the particular skills, the staying motivated and the need to keep your own development in mind. But it also looks at the theology which underpins this ministry.

A fine and detailed bibliography is provided which can lead the reader down more paths and into further information.

All in all, this book is a must-have for anyone even brushing against this ministry. With around 30% of all Church of England priests now SSM – this is a future to take seriously.

(John Lees is an SSM Associate Minister in Holyford Mission Community in East Devon. He is a member of CHRISM and guest speaker at the CHRISM Summer Conference 2018.)

Ruth Brothwell

Priest of the Profane – Ministry in Secular Employment Peter Johnson 2018, ISBN978-3-330-70286-8. Blessed Hope Publishing

(<https://www.blessedhope-publishing.com>), 43 pages. €16.80

The experience of Ministry in Secular Employment is usually best told through story, and this monograph is packed with that story. For readers who have met Peter, he shines through every page – I could hear him telling me the stories throughout.

First the practicals. Blessed Hope Publishing offers publishing and distribution services to authors; a simple search on ‘profane’ in the catalogue finds this work. The book consists of 6 chapters, some very short, each of which is an episode in Peter’s 13 years of ordained MSE ministry. The typeface is small, not exactly easy on the eye, and type-setting is occasionally disjointed. At average paperback typeface this book would be at least 60 pages; I presume fewer pages means less cost.

The minor irks above are more than compensated for by the writing. The first chapter covers ordination (in 2000) and

Peter's early exploration of what MSE meant in his situation, Headteacher of a primary school in Cornwall. It was the Course principal who pointed Peter in the direction of MSE and CHRISM, with the Bishop (of Truro) endorsing this and urging him to form a support group to help reflect on ministry. Peter kept a diary, which he sent to group members prior to each meeting. The value of such a group comes out strongly in this chapter and is a timely reminder that we each need support and sounding boards, not just from fellow MSEs either. A CHRISM day conference at St. Paul's Cathedral Peter describes as "beautifully timed" (5), the talks by Monica Furlong and Charles Ayres (US Tentmaker) making a lasting impression – the story we tell comes from the structures we live with – churches grow relationally rather than structurally. Peter's reflections on this on pages 6 and 7 are thought-provoking.

Peter also relates his early reflections on MSE to the ordination charges and applies these to his context, which was developing from headteacher to a supporter of other heads, resulting in a Countywide post with the LEA that had such value in supporting heads and reducing stress absences that other areas sent representatives to see what was happening.

As Peter points out, the MSE faces two ways at once: the world and the Church. In both the priestly role is to help others recognise and define reality, in the latter context the reality of God's Kingdom. The MSE as leader promotes shared vision, "for which all are working" (9). He notes that one of his first acts after ordination was to offer his resignation as headteacher on the grounds that as he wasn't a

priest when appointed the Governors should think again whether they wanted a priest as head. The unanimous response was that they had appointed Peter for who he was, not what, so resignation refused.

The second chapter, spiritual wellbeing, explains how Peter moved into a County-wide support role, and the development of a strategy for promoting staff wellbeing. Such strategies are now commonplace in both the public and private sectors but in the early days of the new millennium this was radical stuff! After 6 years though this role however fell victim to another present commonplace: budget cuts. Peter cast around for another opportunity and found one advertised as 'Head of Faith, Spirituality, Health and Wellbeing', 3 hours travel away, in Bristol.

Chapter 3, Human-Essence, tells the story of Peter's ministry at the University of the West of England, transforming what had begun as the chaplaincy in the 1970s (run by a board of Trustees) into 'The Living Centre', providing TLC to anyone at the university. (Some will remember the CHRISM Conference there.) There are engaging reflections on here on what it means to be human (the Centre set out to help staff and students to explore this) and secular ministry in a spiritual marketplace. Again a budget squeeze intervened, with the university wanting to change the work in ways Peter disagreed with, so he took redundancy, leading to a period of unemployment (chapter 4) and a period of personal re-assessment.

In Chapter 5, 'Touching the Hem of Healing', Peter describes how this period came to an end when he applied to be

Director of a Christian health organisation, in London (weekly commuting from west Cornwall!) All appeared to be going well – Peter set out a blueprint for developing the organisations work that received enthusiastic and positive feedback. However on his way to a meeting of the Trustees at the end of his 6 month probationary period Peter received a text: don't bother coming as your contract isn't being renewed. No explanation, then or now. Question for a CHRISM conference perhaps: what should distinguish Christian from secular employers? Discuss. Cue a second period of unemployment (chapter 6).

Peter concludes the story by describing his move into parish ministry back in Truro Diocese, not as 'last resort' but an opportunity to share his expertise and experience in a new structure and context, applying it to "the people in the pew" (40). As Peter puts it, "MSE can be both difficult and fulfilling at the same time" (40). It certainly is, and the contexts in which ministry is learned and expressed change over time, as we change. This is a valuable and insightful addition to the canon of MSE stories, and a good read.

Rob Fox





And Finally.....

A tree?

Is this a tree? Or trees?
It's concrete shape
Far from the gentle reaching out
of branches.
No leaves – but grass held vertically
Square above the seat
Where weary travellers may sit
And contemplate the view
Of roads, and tarmac.

If it breathes for us, cleaning the air,
(Does it?)
How many seedlings fewer shall we plant?
Or, how many saplings in a grove could take its place –
How many birds might sing with joy
In their branches,
And how much grass lie roundabout
For play, and picnics?

CHRISM is on **Facebook**, 'Ministers at Work':
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/>
And **LinkedIn**, at:
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3756477>

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

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

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