

Ministers-at-Work

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Editorial

Whose jobs matter – and why? Border force employees dispatching holiday makers; rail crews enabling people with disabilities to travel; doctors and nurses working to cut waiting lists; care workers looking after frail people recently discharged from hospital; teachers growing the skills and confidence of future generations. With strikes and threats of strikes, anxiety about standards particularly in public service, and legislation in preparation to further curtail workers’ rights, work is very much in the news at present.

This edition of Ministers at Work is packed with our members’ thoughts about work and God’s presence in the world around us.. They ask how work is valued, and where work and worship takes place. We also have reflections from the European meeting of worker priests – a great piece on ‘being with’ - and others from the German group’s 50th anniversary celebrations. There is news to celebrate for us with two former Moderators in the Honours List at New Year. This is a very full journal! But please keep thinking and writing!

Pauline Pearson

Valuing People and Their Contributions at Work: *Julian Blakemore*

This article is based on a discussion at the CHRISM Theology Discussion Group meeting on Wednesday, 23rd November 2022. When we think about valuing people and their contributions at work, the question for us is this – is it enough to simply clap them for what they do?

We saw at the beginning of the pandemic a spontaneous outbreak of appreciation for those we'd previously taken for granted, whose roles suddenly assumed a much greater significance. When we were under threat and our dependence on them was suddenly exposed, we realised the vital services they perform, often enduring extremely challenging working conditions for levels of pay that belied their importance to us, and our awareness of their commitment, dedication and sacrifice became heightened.

The Thursday evening clap was instituted in honour of our key workers, when people stood on their doorsteps to applaud them as a sign of support and solidarity. It lasted until it became 'politicised,' by which I mean the show of support began to be used by politicians as an alternative to providing 'real' help to those struggling to cope on the front-line.

There was strong public support for key workers during the pandemic and a realisation that were not being rewarded appropriately for the essential work they do. Unfortunately, this goodwill towards those on the front line, particularly public service jobs (e.g. nurses, care workers, postal workers, public transport staff, refuse collectors, etc.), has dissipated and there has been no 'reset' from a reward perspective. The current cost of living crisis has only exacerbated the situation as tangible support appears to be in short supply.

Now, despite their efforts during the pandemic, many have chosen to leave their professions to find higher paid work elsewhere. Many of those who remain in public service jobs are either striking or holding ballots on whether to take strike action because their pay has been eroded in real terms to the extent that they can no longer afford to live on what they're being paid.

The way we value people and the contributions they make through their work is not just about showing appreciation; it is a matter of social justice.

I will explore the subject under the following four headings, before suggesting some questions for further thought:

Working to live, not living to work

Is there a hierarchy of needs?

Biblical references relating to work

Reflections.

Working to live, not living to work



The idea of working to live rather than living to work is a way of expressing the need for balance between our work and the rest of our lives. It assumes that there is a line between being engaged at work and being consumed by work. However, where that line is drawn will vary from person to person. Feeling passionate about your work, being committed to doing a good job and wanting to build a successful career

is a good thing. The warning signs that your work-life balance might

be getting out of kilter is when your relationships with family and friends start to suffer, there's no time for other activities (e.g. church, hobbies, exercise), you're worrying about work when you're at home, and you're not sleeping well or eating properly.

There are a whole host of reasons that people might give for why they work, some of which are listed on the right.

How we rank each of these factors will depend on individual circumstances and preferences. A key consideration is whether people are working because they want to or because they have to.

It's one thing being in a position where you're free to choose whether to work or not and can be selective about what type of work you are willing to do and quite another to have to take whatever work you can get because you can't afford to live without working.

For most people it's probably not as black and white as this might suggest but, for at least part of our lives, the majority of us have to work for economic reasons. However, we mustn't forget that an important contribution to society is made by those who choose to work on a voluntary basis. They receive no pay for what they do and offer their services for other reasons. Some volunteers might be paid in kind (e.g. free board and lodging), while others will do it because they want to give something back, be helpful, feel useful, make a difference, or learn new skills.

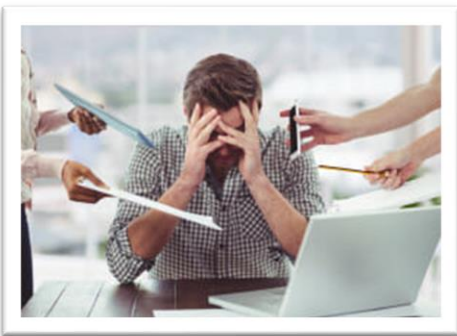
For those who can't work for health reasons or because they have caring responsibilities, the impact from a financial perspective and in terms of self-esteem can be devastating.

Why people work?

- Purpose
- Identity
- Support self / family
- Job satisfaction
- Social interaction
- Learn and develop
- Contribute to society
- Enjoy leisure

For some, even when they do work, what they're paid isn't enough to cover the basics. Of the 5.7 million people claiming Universal Credit in June 2022, 41% (2.3 million) were in work but on low pay and could not afford to live without additional support. The current cost of living crisis is making the situation worse. With wages failing to keep pace with inflation, reliance on food, clothing and warm banks is on the rise.

There is a growing feeling amongst those who work in the public service industries (e.g. the NHS, civil service, rail, mail, teachers, university lecturers) that the real term reduction in their wages, often alongside changes in working terms and conditions, has left them with no option but to take strike action. A strike is usually a last



resort that signifies a breakdown in relations between employees (or their union representatives) and their employers. Having to resort to strike action does not make employees feel valued. We have also seen the disruption that strikes cause to others who are trying to go about their daily business being used as a weapon to turn public opinion against those on strike.

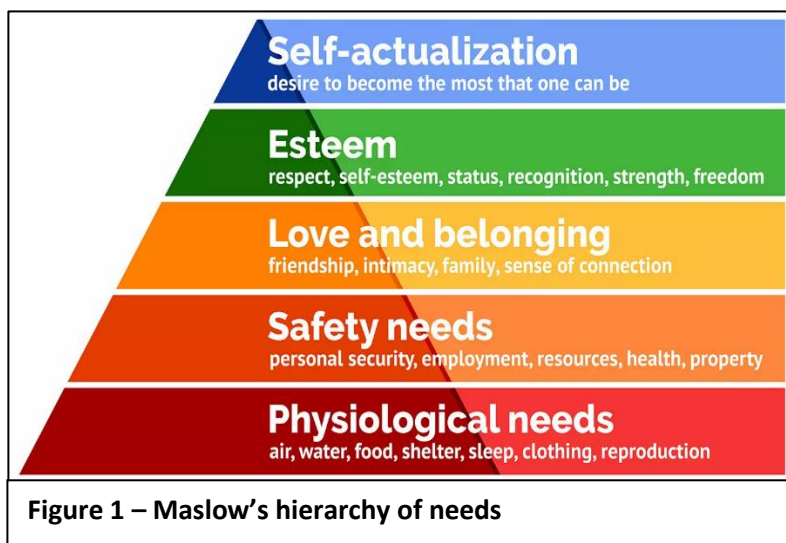
This is a reminder that the world of work does not exist in a vacuum, separated from the rest of life. Work is inextricably linked to the rest of our lives, both in terms of the time and energy we commit to it and the recognition and rewards, financial and non-financial, that we take from it. For most of us, our social status is largely a function of what job(s) we do and how our work is valued

by society. Similarly, our living standards outside of work are determined by what we earn in work. For those living a hand to mouth existence, having to choose between eating and heating, worrying about how they are going to make ends meet is their overriding concern and being hit by unexpected bills is their greatest fear. In this situation, work is part of a daily struggle to survive rather than a means to enjoy life.

Is there a hierarchy of needs?

In thinking about how we value people's work contributions and how we help them to feel valued at work, it is relevant to consider whether there is a hierarchy of human needs which requires certain basic needs to be met before higher order needs can be addressed.

In 1943, Abraham H. Maslow's 'A theory of Human Motivation' was published which proposed just such a hierarchy in which basic physiological needs (e.g. food, water, shelter, clothing, warmth, rest) and safety needs (e.g. security and freedom from fear) had to be



satisfied before higher needs for belongingness and love, esteem and self-fulfilment could begin to be met (see Figure 1).

What motivates people to work has a lot to do with how they are valued and their own perception of self-worth. For Maslow, physiological needs were the most important because they are the biological requirements for human survival. Until they were met, everything else was of secondary concern. His theory was that being deprived of the basics for survival would motivate people to satisfy these needs and that the motivation to do so would become stronger the longer the need was unmet, i.e. a hungry person will only get hungrier until they are fed. However, this argument only holds for a limited time as a prolonged lack of food will ultimately render an individual incapable of satisfying their need for nourishment (or anything else for that matter). Maslow subsequently recognised that needs didn't have to be fully satisfied before an individual could seek to move on to higher levels. He also expanded his model from five to eight stages to also include cognitive, aesthetic and transcendence needs.

Maslow's model has its flaws but is still a useful tool to help focus on human needs, how they interrelate and how a person's overall health and wellbeing can be affected when particular needs are satisfied or neglected. Thus, for those working in low paid jobs, the value of plaudits for a job well done can be severely undermined if that work does not pay enough to ward off hunger or cover the heating bills.



Biblical references to work

The biblical record is strong on valuing people as all being made in the image of God (Gen. 1.26-7), being equal in God's sight (Acts

10.34; cf. Gal. 3.28) and as neighbours (Matt. 22.39). However, it does not contain a huge number of specific references to guide our thinking on how to value people's work contributions. The following attempts to capture some of the important ones:

Theme	Principles	Reference
The nature of work	Work is God-given	Genesis 2.15
	The balance between work and rest	Exodus 23.12 (cf. Exodus 20.8-11)
	Work is to be enjoyed	Ecclesiastes 3.12-13,22
	Work as vocation	Nehemiah 2.17-18
Workers' pay and treatment	Incidental laws relating to payment of workers	Deuteronomy 24.14-15
	Warnings against not paying workers	Jeremiah 22.13
	Labourers deserve their food (the Mission of the Twelve)	Matthew 10.5-10
	The labourers in the vineyard	Matthew 20.1-16
Integrity at work	Warnings against unjust practices	Amos 8.5-7
	Providing for the poor	Deuteronomy 24.19
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Reflections

Work is ordained by God (Gen. 2.15) and is part of our service to God and society. At its most basic, paid work is a way of supporting ourselves and those who are dependent on us economically but work, whether paid or unpaid, can also be source of personal growth and fulfilment.

The wisdom writer says that God wants people to be happy in their work and for it to be a source of pleasure to them (Ecc. 3.12ff).

When work is making us unhappy, not only will our performance suffer but other aspects of our life might also be adversely affected, e.g. our relationships, health and self-esteem. This is unsustainable over the longer-term. We have to identify why we are unhappy at work and consider what can be done to change the situation.

God intends us to maintain a balance between work and rest (Ex. 23.12), which is important to our health and wellbeing. Working all the hours God sends is not an ideal situation, although can be a necessity for some to keep their heads above water financially. People also need time for rest and relaxation to keep well. Thinking of our working lives as an offering to God, as much as any other part of our lives, can help us rise above the mundane and find a higher purpose in what we do. If we do not draw connections between our work and the values and priorities we hold dear as members of God's covenant people, then our lives and work will be ethically and spiritually incoherent. We should aim to please God in our work, just as we seek to do in our worship or other parts of our lives.

Some regard their work as a vocation or calling. They will often go above and beyond what they are required to do because they love their work and want to do the best job that they can. Often, they will not be the best paid jobs. It is important that society does not take vocational workers for granted or exploit their goodwill. This is a matter of social justice (Deut. 24.14-15; Jer. 22.13). Scripture is quite clear that employers should not exploit workers or withhold their wages.

I included the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard because a Seventh Day Adventist I knew told me about an experience he'd had at work. The company he worked for was bringing in new people from outside and paying them more than him and his colleagues, even though the recruits hadn't got the same experience or knowledge as the existing staff who continued to shoulder most of the work. He said that when he confronted his boss about the unfairness of the situation with the new recruits getting paid more for doing less work, his boss referred him to this story and said he was surprised that a Christian should have a problem with what he was doing as it showed he could pay his employees what he liked. My friend replied that in the story, the owner of the vineyard paid all the employees the same and that all the existing staff were looking for was parity. This parable is challenging at the best of times but imagine if the owner of the vineyard had paid the workers he hired last more than those that had borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. He would have struggled to claim that he was being generous then. Rewarding people fairly, and being seen to do so, is a key part of valuing people at work.

When sending his disciples out on mission, Jesus tells them not to carry money or supplies for their journey and not to ask for payment for labourers deserve their food. However, this assumes a



level of hospitality and care in communities to recognise people's contributions and ensure that no one is left without the basics they need to survive. When it was set-up in the years following the Second World War, the UK Welfare State was intended to provide a 'safety net' for the poor and vulnerable in society by helping them to get their lives back on an even keel. Political arguments have raged over the years about whether the Welfare State creates a disincentive for working and investment. Cuts to welfare spending have resulted in increasing reliance on charities and churches to fill the gap with food, bedding and warm banks. The demand for these services has risen dramatically during the current cost of living crisis.

For the Deuteronomist, seeking to be faithful to God's law informs all aspects of social life. Ideally, this would involve the elimination of poverty. However, confronted with the reality that there was



poverty in Israel, the response was to emphasise that all who lived under God's covenant were required to help each other. This translates into society having a responsibility to make sure that all its members have access to the resources they need to live, which, in turn means providing for those

who can't work (Deut. 24.19).

Gleaning was the process of picking up the stray heads of grain that remain in a field after the harvesters have passed through. According to God's covenant with Israel, farmers were not allowed to glean their own fields, but were to allow poor people (literally "widows and orphans") to glean them as a way of supporting themselves. This created a rudimentary form of social welfare, based on creating an opportunity for the poor to work (by gleaning the fields) rather than having to beg, steal or starve. Gleaning offers a way to participate in

the dignity of work, even for those who are unable to participate in the labour market due to lack of resources, socio-economic dislocation, discrimination, disability, or other factors. God not only wants everyone's needs to be met, he wants to offer everyone the dignity of working to meet their needs and the needs of others.

Finally, an important part of feeling that your work is worthwhile and that your contribution is valued is being able to hold your head up and be proud of what you've done. To do this, you must undertake your work with honesty and integrity. Wages must not be earned unjustly (Amos 8.5-7). Amos indicts the merchants who use inferior products, false weights, and other deceptions to reap a profit at the expense of vulnerable consumers. They say to themselves, "We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat."

The question of valuing people and their contributions at work is a complicated one. There is no doubt that we should value those we work with as people. We should also recognise and praise the contributions they make. Some argue that money is not a motivator, or only a weak one, and that other factors matter more. This depends on individual circumstances. It is certainly true for volunteer workers.

However, amongst those who work to earn a living, pay is important, particularly if it's a struggle to get by on what they take home. This becomes an even bigger issue if the real value of their pay has been eroded over time so they're effectively being paid less for doing the same job. If as a society we really value the work that people do to the extent that we're prepared to call them key workers and applaud them for their efforts, we have to be prepared



to make sure that they are properly rewarded. To do less would be disingenuous and to take them for granted.

Questions for discussion:

1. What makes people feel they or their contributions are undervalued at work?
2. Is there a hierarchy of human needs? To what extent can kind words and public gestures compensate for lack of decent pay?
3. How can we make people feel that what they do is valued?
4. What needs to change in society for key workers' pay to reflect the reliance we place on them?
5. How can Christian communities help change attitudes?

MSE in the future shape and meaning of work: Ruth Brothwell

For some time, since lockdown I had been reflecting on the issue of the validity of MSE 'through a screen'. Engaged in MS Teams meetings and many 'zoom' calls which I am sure will be familiar to

many, I had missed the personal interaction. Even in sacramental ministry I had missed the physical nearness of the Eucharist. So, it was a pleasure to share some meanderings and see what others felt.

A recent Newspaper article stated that:

‘Work should no longer be considered a place’ senior civil servants have declared in open revolt of Government’s condescending drive to get workers back to the office. A government spokesman said “there is total agreement across government of there being clear benefits from face-to-face working”’.

This is not now of course super current... employees can ask for hybrid flexible working practices... perhaps it remains to be seen how it will all work out. So, what does this all mean for MSE? If we are Ministers in Secular EMPLOYMENT – does this denote that we are ministers at a place of work. We have often associated ourselves with being ministers at a ‘place’ be it in industrial offices, healthcare situations, schools and universities, factories.... the essence of what we are and do is located in the context of being at a place of work among others who are also there working.

Post Covid – what do we now find? Is it right to say that we are still ‘at work’ if we are not at a place of work any longer?

Is the work that we do as valid as the place where we do it?

I reflected that our different experiences of MSE tend to fall into categories of:

- The people we minister to – in the workplace – who might not ever find their way into a church

- The actual work that we do – how the work itself is a ministry and ministers to others.

One of our discussion group reminded us that the church was divided into two areas:

- Communities of place
- Communities of practice

He said that the church had been quite good at ‘communities of place’ – parishes had sprung up over history and worked pretty well. Communities of practice was different. It was also mentioned however, that ‘Generation Z’ would be somewhat surprised by our



hang-ups on this issue!!

Some will recall a CHRISM conference led by Jim Francis on ‘Busking the Gospel’. Jim had lots to say and was writing a book. I confess, its publication bypassed me until now and I read with interest that his thoughts had meandered along similar paths to my own. At one stage he quotes Michael Ramsay as saying ‘ordained ministry has a social as well as a church dimension in reflecting the priesthood of Christ that embraces world and church’. (Busking the Gospel by

James M.M. Francis, Sacristy Press 2021). So, Ramsey felt that sacramental ministry sat alongside social or working ministry.

I was reminded by a fellow priest that the very earliest forms of sacramental worship placed the priest behind a screen. He was hidden from the people. Perhaps because the very consecration of the things of God demanded total 'at-one ness' with God and this is what the priest did on the peoples' behalf – it was not for them to see it or watch it all happening in some kind of voyeurism. Indeed, in the Orthodox church today the priest still consecrates behind the screen – the iconostasis - and brings the consecrated elements out to the people... Sacramental ministry – but what about the social or pastoral??

The ministry of MSE to the people we work with is by and large a pastoral ministry. So, I had wondered if it was possible to 'do this' from behind a screen...remotely? Did Jesus ever minister remotely? There is one story which came to mind and it appears in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. (Matt 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10) Jesus heals the Centurion's servant.

There are many issues that arise in this story but of particular interest to my reflection is the subject of ministry- in this case healing but actually also the evangelism involved in Jesus showing his power to all the people who were there round and about – and the message he gave to those in attendance. Certainly, this Centurion was a senior figure in the occupation forces, rich – not someone who would normally be associated with Jesus' ministry. I think we might all agree that much of our ministry is to people who would not otherwise receive it.

This man was desperate and had heard about Jesus and his healing powers. He came to Jesus to ask for the healing of his servant. Exchanges occurred over whether Jesus should go to the Centurion's house but in the end, Jesus healed the servant remotely

because of the faith shown and did not actually go to the 'place' where the servant was. Indeed – he may not have even seen the Centurion at all as the accounts differ a little. It was certainly a 'remote' act of Jesus' healing ministry in which Jesus was never in the 'place' at all.

So, in these post-Covid times as many of us are working at home or at least perhaps, sometimes, working somewhere other than our old place of work, we may have examples of where we are still able to minister remotely as it were. Do we?

Is this through prayer? Is MSE a ministry of prayer??

Is this through conversation? Via Zoom or by phone or email perhaps? Members of our group shared experiences including some which Jim had included in his book.

We considered - are we reaching people still – through remote means rather than in the office kitchen, the break out area, by the photocopier, at the nursing station, in the staff room.... wherever it might be? Is MSE still valid? Is it still as fruitful as it was when we were alongside people?

Is MSE different now? How do we talk about it? Are there other theological examples and foundations? People shared ways that collaboration had actually improved throughout the pandemic. Much



was shared too about the work of MSE towards the employers themselves...not just speaking truth to power but actual examples of how, as people of God we had influenced the thinking and practice of our employers through suggestion and example. This brought up MSE issues which have been debated in Chrism conferences over the years but new people brought new ideas.

But other people – particularly the elderly and less able are finding it very helpful. We know that although some people have returned to our churches...attendance is still not yet at pre-covid levels. We know too that many people have availed themselves of ‘church’ through remote access and the church continues to offer online streaming – our ‘church’ is changing...On the subject of sacramental worship, I feel I should share that I have actually found it very hard indeed to accept ‘spiritual communion’. Even though I had been told by senior members of my Church of England that communion is still valid etc etc.... I really missed taking communion for real. Now I am back in church I find it hugely helpful and breathe a kind of sigh of relief. So – behind a screen didn’t really work for me sacramentally.

So, are we in some strange way returning to the Orthodoxy of ‘behind the screen’? I note that many of our old Anglican parish churches have the remains of the Rood Screen in place, which



effectively creates a barrier between the people and the priests. And are our ‘screens’ any different? Are we actually seeing a time when the sacramental work of the priest is not necessarily visible to all.

MSE – Ministry in Secular Employment - has many challenges in these days as always. The Theology Discussion group enjoyed considering them together. What do you think?

The Worker Priests want their vision to endure!

An article from “La Croix”, a French religious newspaper published the week after the International Worker Priest conference. Translated by Phil Aspinall

The Worker Priests (prêtres-ouvriers) met over the 3rd – 5th September in Orsay for their national Rendezvous. Their ministry has changed with the mutations of the world of work and, faced with their declining numbers, the “PO” hope that their vision, to share the working conditions with those on the lowest rung, will remain.

Raymond Méroni, 80, is symbolic of this generation. Throughout his working life he was a lathe operator and a fitter in the aeronautical industry. A union member and a representative in the CGT. And above all – and always – a worker priest. He heard a colleague in the foundry say “If a priest like you is with us, we’re not just shit!”. He spoke of the strikes where he saw that “to struggle for justice is to live the life of God”. Today, however, he asks himself: in a secularised society, where union membership declines and the world of work crumbles, as he puts it, what gospel message do we bring?

France cannot count more than 300 worker priests today, without including other priests in work, such as the Mission de France. Only about 20 still work. At its height in the 1970s, the movement had about 1000 priests in work.

Among the 75 participants in the national meeting there were two generations. Firstly, the large group of the older PO with lives

moulded in factory work, engagements with the unions and in social struggles, who today continue to live out their ministry in tower blocks or, for some, retirement homes. And, in the midst of them, six who are still active: ambulance driver, casual worker, workers in agriculture and catering. They live with the same vision as their elders, less militant, but always sharing in the same working conditions as “those who are left by the wayside”.

Lionel Vandembriele, 41, has been a priest for 13 years. He became a worker when he realised that the church was present in the key moments of life – baptism, marriage, burial – but not necessarily between each of them. Those who he was close to spoke of their working life, which he could not understand because he did not live in the same way. So, he set out to find a job. It was necessary that this work enabled him to live the life of ordinary people. He became an ambulance driver. Recently he helped to negotiate a company agreement to “safeguard the few rights the employees had. For me, it’s politics, and that is to participate in the construction of the Kingdom of God”.



“The drought this year lives in me” confided Jean-Paul Harvard, 63, a farm worker employed by three farmers. Closely connected with his employers, he shares their anxiety and asks “how will we survive this winter?”. The opportunity of a life as a priest in the world of work is, he thinks, to maintain “an intimate relationship with the word of God” which allows him to “give a clarity to the situations of life”.



To the question “are you a union supporter?” a long time PO, Jean-Pierre Mason, 59, chef in a hostel for the unemployed, responds that “my mission is somewhat different. I am more about listening and being with others. But if there are struggles to lead, I’ll lead them”.

Clear in the face of their decline, the PO hope above all that the vision which motivated them will survive. “Recognised as the agents of dignity in their workplaces and in their local communities, they have shared the lives of people day by day and in their struggles” to quote Frederic Lanthonie, national representative for the mission in the world of work for the French Bishop’s conference.

“My profound conviction is that God loves those who are at the bottom of the ladder” declares Pierre Niobey forcefully. A former mason, now 83, member of the France/Palestine association and of his local council. “If one is not alongside people, one cannot

witness”. He insists: “What matters to us, is that what we have tried to live out will continue to be lived. The Holy Spirit will decide how”

ÊTRE AVEC, MIT, CON, WITH: a reflection on the meeting of the European working brothers and sisters by Lionel Vandembriele

What follows is a translation/paraphrase of Lionel's original article which appeared in the journal of the French Worker Priests (Courrier PO).

Lionel is a priest who works as a paramedic.

Having been invited to the national gathering of the French Worker Priests, the group of European working brothers and sisters met again between 3 and 4 September 2022 at Orsay. Two meetings which complemented, rather than opposed, each other. While the French reflected on the theme Passionate about fellowship (Passionnés de fraternité), the Europeans took the time to catch up with one another after their last meeting around the theme Christian faith today in relation to the historic experience of the worker priests.

We were happy to meet again among brothers and sisters around the same table. After a general welcome, each one recounted what was most important in their life over the last year.

A year on, what has changed in our lives? What has helped me to keep going? Two emphases emerged from this sharing: work and the evolving situations of life, and we live in the call to be full members of the working people. It is a life choice which we make each day. It is not enough in the morning to share the bread of life.

One day we chose to belong to the working people, the world of work, to live with ordinary people. This choice is written in the historic experience of the worker priests. Experience rooted in the Christian faith. Today what is the link between Christian faith and the experience of the worker priests? It is this question which guided our sharing in the afternoon.

The story of the relationship between the Church and the working world is specific to each country, with an individuality which is both collective and individual. In this relationship and this particularity, what is the relevance of the mission of the worker priests? Our daily lives are tied to the historic experience of the worker priests,



and it is this which gives meaning to how we live with our companions on the road of daily life. This is written in a fundamental belief: to be with. To be with, to struggle with, to suffer with, that is our experience as working brothers and sisters in the 21st century.

Experience which is written in the story of the worker priests. Where the dimension of *being with* is in tension with the dimension of changing things with. It is the tension between the individual particularity and the collective dimension of our ministry.

This *being with* is rooted in Christian faith. Jesus Christ is the first to live with us. He is the incarnation of God *being with* us in our humanity. We live by faith in Jesus Christ, whose *being with* is a promise for the future.

50 years of the German Worker Priests

A translation of the history and introduction to the group given in their invitation to the 50th anniversary weekend.

It was in 1972 that the so-called Worker Priests set off on a journey to leave behind the usual paths of the Catholic Church, following the steps of the Christian Young Workers and the Little Brothers and Sisters in the tradition of Charles de Foucauld. In their pack they carried, in various mixtures: the Bible, the left-leaning spectrum of catholic social teaching and Karl Marx. They went into factories, urban neighbourhoods, trades unions, projects and movements.

Motivation, politicisation and radicalism in theory and practice were less important. It was about more than that: to be with the least and the exploited of the earth; others emphasised the class struggle and the ending of capitalism. Above all, and to the surprise of the "Church": they did not go for mission, but to live with, to be with, in solidarity. We wanted to learn, not to teach. Two conferences each year served for an exchange of experiences, for reflection and analysis.

And we recall: class struggle was in decline. Factories began to close, mines had to shut. However the folklore was still alive and the "Internationale" was still sung vociferously. But it was not all folklore. New movements were arising: the theology and practice of Liberation in the lands of the global south, renewed political theology in Europe, a lively criticism of Capitalism. Add to this the women's movement, and the peace and anti-nuclear movements. We later summarised it as being about Justice, Peace and the

protection of Creation. And in all this, about struggles and contemplation, about spirituality and resistance. The once classic workplace, with businesses and unions in transitions, remained important to us, but the horizon of necessary changes had widened.



The former male worker priest movement of the 1970's was transformed into the present "Working Brothers and Sisters" (literally "Working Siblings"). Men, women, diverse, clergy, lay. Protestant, Catholic, and a few others. In each of our weekend conferences everyone gives a personal-political report around the table on Saturday morning. "Never in any group have I heard reports of such a variety of struggles as at Kloster Ilbenstadt at the six-monthly meeting of the so-called working brothers and sisters" said someone from the group.

The permanent questions in our group are always "where are the places and the actors for democratic change?" We want to learn, not teach. In the church tradition, to which we relate, we would point to the apostle Paul. As he worked as a tentmaker, he is for us the original working brother. This Paul wrote: "Time is running out ! The hour has come to arise. Let us put away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light". We also refer to our biblical roots where, among others, the prophet Jeremiah writes: "I want to give you a future and hope".



Amazon or Amazon? A snapshot of the 50th anniversary of the German working brothers and sisters (Arbeitergeschwister), Herzogenrath 11-13 November 2022: Margaret Trivasse

A significant amount of time was devoted to the 30+ participants sharing our circumstances. I was struck by the fact that two members were working for Amazon or one of its subsidiaries and also that several of those present had connections to Latin America (Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and the South American Group to protect the Amazon).



For me, this summarized two main foci of the German group: involvement in the everyday workplace and commitment to the global South and issues connected with the climate and environment, such as ethically sourced and produced water. The group also has had a traditional commitment to pacificism – which is

generating much debate and concern in the light of the war in Ukraine. Several are involved with asylum seekers and refugees as well as providing housing for vulnerable people and working in soup kitchens.

Despite my lack of German (and many thanks to Phil for his summaries which enabled me to keep up with what was going on) I felt very much at home among kindred spirits. One of the small workshop groups even held its discussion in English so that I could participate. I enjoyed being back in the comfortable and attractive setting of the Nell-Breuning-Haus, where the European Worker Priest Conference has been held previously. The weather was beautiful, so a walk which some of us took around the local fields was refreshing.

Worship was uncluttered, informal yet dignified and with plenty of stillness. The group has a magnificent songbook which we used both in and out of worship. The singing was magnificent, particularly the unaccompanied harmonizing of Taizé chants and the singing of rounds.

My impression was that the age profile of German group is slightly lower than that of the French equivalent but nevertheless there were many retired people within the gathering. It was noticeable that most of the economic and social problems which we are experiencing in the UK are also prevalent in the German-speaking countries and the Low Countries. This, of course, directly affects those who have chosen low-paid work as their vocation as well as those living in absolute poverty.

I valued the warmth of the welcome in my first visit to the Arbeitergeschwister. It was good to meet again those colleagues who are regular participants in the European gathering and to encounter a wide range of others. The group as a whole felt creative and energetic, and I warmed to their political activism, a

theme we are revisiting in CHRISM. I hope we can maintain our links and continue to learn from them.



Let me tell you a story..... Phil Aspinall

Several things leapt out at me during Vaughan Roberts' evening session on "*Kingdom Stories and our Stories*": from his presentation, from the discussion in our group, and from the feedback from others. I offer you my reflections on what I heard, not a report of what was said. (Quotations are not attributed). The underlying theme seemed to be the power of story, which we know well from previous CHRISM weekends, and particularly from sessions on parables; using story to explain what we see happening around us in our work: "the Kingdom of Heaven is like....."

One starting point was Vaughan's observation that many people are not interested in theoretical input or models – "They just wanted to tell their stories". We spoke of how people wanted to tell stories about their (extra)ordinary lives and their working lives (noting, as someone said, that the latter are often not heard or encouraged in church).

We were given the challenging thought – what are the stories we tell about the organisational structures in which we work ? It was suggested that there is an interesting contrast between the story of the organisation, and the individual stories of those who are in it – "don't dismiss the different stories of the same situation" someone said.

Stories are great ! But they are only effective if they are heard, and we were given several examples of the transformations which came when people found that their stories were being heard – someone remarked that it is a real skill to listen without imposing one's own agenda.

Stories come from individuals and specific situations and “bubble up from underground as if from an aquifer” – liberating the contribution of the individual. Conversely, storytelling may not be benign – it can become an exercise of power, by imposing a narrative on an organisation or a situation. On the other hand, I recall my days working in an organisation which adopted TQM (some of you might recall this), Total Quality Management, which relied on freeing up people and group sat work to tell stories of what they saw going on around them, and develop plans themselves to make it better.

Stories when not benign can often be harsh and painful. We heard of the struggles and eventual collapse of the East Midlands' coal mining industry and its impact on communities, where many men found themselves discarded while the women found new roles – with consequences for family relationships. Again – there is the narrative of the organisation and the stories individuals tell.

And in this story telling environment it is important that all stories



are let in. Some people just love telling (often very long) anecdotes – but how do we manage the verbal space so that everyone can be heard? (In my work conducting safety studies, I often find that it is the quiet people who have the

most useful things to say, but are crowded out by those who talk). It is another real skill to manage all the participants!

A fundamental theme was how we tell Kingdom stories – following Jesus' example of using stories pointing to the Kingdom of God. Where do we see the signs of the Kingdom, and how do we tell these stories, particularly outside the church – in the world, our workplaces and our communities? (And, someone asked, what language do we use to do this?). It is by telling such stories that we empower people to see God at work in their lives, to find the Kingdom at Work. There are many stories – one astute observation was that the affirmation of diversity does not allow one single coherent narrative. But perhaps that is itself another parable: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like....”

We were reminded of the structure of the CHRISM mission statement: first, to see – and hear – the presence of God in our work, and – then – to tell the Christian story there. Someone posed the question: is there a different story in the church and in the world. Frankly, I don't believe God has deserted either. Rather than impose, our task is, as we have acknowledged, first to listen to the stories.....

Retiring and returning: *Margaret Trivasse*

I had thought that I would work until I dropped. However, a combination of home-working during Covid, changes at work, the need for exercise and the retirement of most of my friends led to my taking the significant step on 1 April 2022 after having worked for the NHS for 20 years. I simultaneously retired from the parish to which I was licensed. As a counsellor who has always attached high importance to boundaries and safe working practice, working from home meant less distance from the job and I felt that the service delivered to clients via phone and (occasionally) video was

inferior. Furthermore, I had been seeing fewer refugees and asylum seekers, which was my specialist area.

I had plenty of ideas as to what I wanted to do in retirement but I wanted to try to discern God's call at this time in my life and so I booked myself on a week's silent retreat at St Beuno's in North Wales.



I was interested to observe how similar to counselling were my meetings with my Guide. He was a young Jesuit in training but listened with great skill and sensitivity to my random ramblings about my relationship with God and my striving to know what the call was all about in retirement. I came away with reflections about the spirituality of friendship and encountering God when out walking. But what to do about the parish-shaped hole?

I attended part of a conference organized by HeartEdge, a grouping which is probably closest to where I am theologically. A couple of people in general conversation asked me, "What is your role in your church?", clearly expecting to say that I was a Reader or parish priest. I was fascinated to note that my immediate response was, "I'm very involved with CHRISM" and went on to explain who we are.

I found myself reflecting during the various presentations on "what (who) is church?" Christians tend to say that "church" is the collective noun for the Christian community, but almost always start

referring to the local or institutional church. I heard for the first time the phrase “household of God”, which I warmed to, not feeling comfortable with “Kingdom”, and recognizing that my previous preferred alternative, “Commonwealth”, also has uncomfortable connotations. CHRISM has defined itself as not church, but about the encounter with God in the workplace. But it’s the most explicitly Christian activity I do. This was a further thread in my reflections on vocation, that my overt Christian role in retirement is my commitment to CHRISM, while my hidden role continues to be in counselling, and specifically with refugees.

As part of CHRISM, I also identify a vocational element to help with connection to the European Worker Priests, many of whom live or work with asylum seekers and refugees. My absolute belief that as well as individual human beings not being islands and having responsibilities towards one another, the British Isles ought not to become socially detached from the European main.

Retirement? I have returned to counselling; I am now working two days a week with the Refugee Council. I have certainly not retired

Telling our Stories

Following the Summer Conference at the Kairos Centre we published two individual stories of MSE in the October edition of Ministers at Work. You might recall that an aspiration of the weekend was that it would lead to a separate booklet of stories which we could distribute more widely.

We would still hope to do this, but it obviously needs more stories. Would you be willing to contribute yours ? If so, please let the Editor know, and we will be able to see if we have a viable number. We will at least include any contributions in a future edition.

from CHRISM and its European siblings. God's call is about making connections. The conference stressed the interconnectedness with each other and also with creation.

The Labourers in the Vineyard – an MSE view: Rob Fox

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16, is familiar to all of us, and we may have reached on it many times. It is however worthy of another look, from an unashamedly MSE perspective, revealing significant points that are often overlooked.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?”

Or are you envious because I am generous?” So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” (NRSV).

The ‘usual daily wage’ is a denarius, which some translations make explicit.

Two important points about this parable are the immediate and economic contexts in which Jesus told it. It comes immediately after Jesus has been asked by the ‘rich young man’, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (19:16). Here Jesus subverts the expectations of the young man, who, implicitly, expected to be told to go and do something that he could then leave in his past, a one-off ticket to eternal life. Instead, he is told to go and sell his possessions and give the money to the poor, an act that would be life-changing for the young man, with consequences for how he lived his life going forward. Prior to this Jesus explains that to understand the Kingdom of Heaven we must be as little children, and calls children to him to make the point (19:13-15). In turn this follows Jesus subverting the contemporary understanding of divorce (19:1-12), making it clear that the practice of divorcing a wife by note of dismissal devalues her in a way inconsistent with the way God values us.

Looking back further to the ‘Kingdom of Heaven is like ...’ parables, their content and context is consistently of challenging contemporary assumptions and practises. So it is with the labourers in the vineyard, itself likened (by “For ..”) with the preceding message to the rich young man.

For the economic context we need to look back to land reforms carried out by Pompey after Palestine was annexed by Rome in 63BC. Much agricultural land was appropriated by the Roman authorities to settle veterans, and estates were given to client rulers, such as the Herodian dynasty, which in turn passed lands to courtiers and favourites. The result a significant increase in landless

peasants, with no land of their own to subsistence farm, now living hand to mouth as day labourers, in a precarious economic position, at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. It was to this landless workforce that the owner of the vineyard in Jesus' parable went when he needed labourers to harvest from his vines. Predicting when grapes have reached just the right balance of ripeness and sugar content is a fine art, and the decision that 'today is the day' was likely not taken until that morning. Grape picking is also labour-intensive, hence the several visits to the marketplace, where casual labourers gathered in the hope of hire.

The immediacy of the owner's need for labour, and as much of it as possible, worked to the advantage of the early arrivals at the marketplace. Rather than standing in a row hoping to be picked, they knew they would all be needed so were able to ask for and get the going rate for a day's work, without having to haggle. For once they had a little economic muscle. Knowing that more labour is needed, the vineyard owner returns to the marketplace at 9 o'clock, hiring all the available workers. No specific pay agreement is made, but the owner tells them he will pay whatever is just. He returns again at 12, 3 and 5 o'clock, finding more labourers and hiring them,



again with no specific agreement on wages. Of the final group he asks, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." This emphasises the precariousness of day-

labour, but also the debilitating effects of long-term unemployment. Those who have come later in the day may have found it difficult to motivate themselves to get up early to seek work. And clearly

unemployment was a major issue, given the numbers who kept turning up in the marketplace.

At 6 o'clock, as the law required, the labourers were gathered to be paid; it was at this hour so that they still had time to go and buy what they needed for themselves and their families. Some measure of labour welfare legislation is not new. In a reverse of usual practice, the owner tells his manager to pay the latecomers first, and to give them a full day's pay, even though they had worked but one hour. The group hired at 3 o'clock also receive a denarius, and those hired 12 and 9. Jesus deliberately reverses the expectation of paying first those who laboured the entire day. It will ensure the effect of the parable, for it is essential that those who were hired first will know what wage is being paid to those who were hired last. There is to be no concealment of the good will of the owner.

The culture of Palestine in Jesus' day emphasised honour and shame (cf. Joseph's initial response to learning that Mary was pregnant, how the woman taken in adultery was treated, the parable of the guests at a banquet), and the labourers were embedded in this. Those hired at the beginning of the day complained that they were being dishonoured by the later workers receiving the same pay as them. They have been made equal to those who laboured only one hour. Their differential had been eroded and they didn't like it. Antagonized by what they perceive to be an injustice, the laborers who put in a twelve-hour workday voice their objection to the landlord. Addressing one of them, he, in response, reminds them that they had contracted with him for one denarius.

"Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

The owner reminds the complainant that he had agreed the 'usual daily wage', which they had proposed when they were hired. He is doing them no wrong, but fulfilling the agreement made and mutual undertakings given. No wrong has been done, as the owner himself rightly maintains. The correspondence between his agreement with the wage the workers have bargained for, and his sense of "what is right" bears witness to his integrity. In his freedom he has chosen to act in an unusual manner, that is, to pay all those who laboured in his vineyard one denarius, regardless of how long they actually worked during this twelve-hour period: "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" Like other landlords, he owns the means of production, the vineyard. But unlike them, he does not exploit his labourers by depriving them of the surplus value of their work. He develops productivity by hiring more workers; and that means more workers can earn a living for themselves and their families. But he does not increase his profit at their expense. Accordingly, the self-expansion that capitalism produces goods and services by depriving labourers of the surplus value of their labour is here cancelled.

Those who worked in the vineyard for twelve hours believe that they have been treated unfairly, for, as they have asserted, "We have borne the burden and the heat of the day." Naturally they think they deserve more, but its fulfilment would perpetuate the values which the rich and the powerful foster in order to "divide and rule" those on whom they are dependent for labour. What they have



forgotten is their own advantage of being hired at the beginning of the day. It is a stark reality that opportunity is not always equal for all people, through age, ill-health, responsibility towards

children or the sick. Yet their needs, like the needs of all unemployed people, are very much the same, and the distribution of the owner is not determined by opportunity and its advantages, but according to need. Those hired first, however, are not concerned about the advantages of opportunity. Although formerly equal in their unemployment, they were hired first and therefore have worked an unequal number of hours, and yet they have received the wage they specified. But in view of the circumstances, they insist on payment according to achievement of having worked all day and therefore longer than all the others who were hired. Precisely what the owner had intended to expose by the order of paying the workers from the last to the first has manifested itself. In response to their antagonism, he confronts them with the possibility of their own lack of equity and generosity.

Jesus ends his story with the question of the owner of the vineyard, "Are you envious because I am generous?" Its intention, of course, is to confront the addressees of the gospel with the self-examination that the question implies. What is the basis of their sense of justice? Is it determined by the values of the privileged, who exploit them and whose economic policies of "divide and rule" are designed to promote envy and alienation among them, in order to inhibit their solidarity? Or is their sense of justice to be established on the basis of the generosity and love that all the workers are experiencing at the hand of the vineyard owner. By paying each of them the same wage, he is recognizing the equality of their needs. And, at the same time, he is attempting to enable them to become conscious of the solidarity that unites them in their common experience of exploitation and injustice at the hands of the landlords and owners of the means of production.

This story offers a comparison between the Kingdom of Heaven and a remarkable landlord who, unlike his contemporaries, subverts the contemporary economic order by not extracting the surplus value

of their labour. It is not necessary to identify God with this extraordinary landlord. The reality of God's rule is like the landlord, who, by refusing to increase his own profit at the expense of his hired workers, subverts the exchange value of labour. That is the subversive character of Jesus' story, a story that is a parable and as such shatters the myth of agricultural capitalism. But it also illustrates the character of the Kingdom, corresponding to the principle that Jesus enunciated in 19:20, "the first will be last and the last first;" and, at the same time, reinforces it by its repetition in 20:16. It is a reversal relative to the order in which the workers in the vineyard paid: "...the last will be first and the first last." In the Kingdom, whoever is called first and therefore may work the longest and perhaps the hardest has no advantage over latecomers. Rewards for service are not handed out according to human standards of fair play, but according to grace, which we all need in equal measure.

Good news!

If you have pored over the list of New Year's honours, you might already have seen these two pieces of good news:

MBE

The Reverend Dr. Margaret Jane JOACHIM, Chair, English Candidates' Committee, Liberal Democrats. For services to Women in Politics.



Margaret said, "An MBE for services to Women in Politics isn't the most obvious award for a priest! But I have been working in the political arena since the 1970s, long before I or any women could be ordained. It started with the 300 Group (to get 50% of MPs to be women) and Women Into Public Life, standing in three general elections, and setting up the European Women's Lobby in 1989. Then, because at that time Anglican clergy couldn't be MPs, it morphed into 30 years' back-room work for the Liberal Democrats, two-thirds of whose MPs are now female. Politics can be a harsh, nasty place, and people who work in it need support and ministry just as much as anyone else. And as Desmond Tutu was fond of saying: 'When people say that the Bible and politics don't mix, I ask them which Bible they are reading.'"

BEM

The Reverend Peter Duncan KING, T.D. For services to the Church and to the community in South London.

The Church Times noted this award, and that Peter is a Minister in Secular Employment and judge of the Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) with a particular interest in human rights and migration.

Many congratulations to them both. Two past Moderators at once!

Forthcoming Events:

CHRISM Theology Discussion Group - Future Meetings

This Discussion Group, which is open to all CHRISM members, provides an online forum where we can reflect on and discuss the theological aspects of our work. We meet monthly by Zoom for an hour and a half. Recent topics have included: The Importance of our Work to God and Us, The Idea of Rest, What is Work?, Justice at Work, The Kingdom at Work Project, Eternal Life, Christian

Perspectives on Conflict in the Workplace, Organisational values - Help or hindrance to ministry in the workplace?, Is it OK to be ambitious?, Who is Jesus?, and Neighbourliness at Work.

If you are interested in joining the Theology Discussion Group, please email me at rev.julian.e.blakemore@gmail.com and I will add you to the invitation list so that you receive Zoom links for future meetings.

We look forward to welcoming you.

Revd Julian Blakemore

Coming soon! Reflective weekend 2023

It's not too late to sign up for the 2023 Reflective weekend, 10th - 12th February at Sarum College, Salisbury. Places are still available and we very much hope you will be able to attend. We can continue to accept bookings after the closing date on 12th January.

Led by Mike Rayner, we will look at how Food and Faith interact.

“I Go to the Hills....” Annual Conference 23rd – 25th June 2023

We hope you will very much welcome the opportunity for a visit to the Lake District in the midsummer. This year's CHRISM Summer Conference will be held at Rydal Hall, sitting beside Rydal Water, just north of Grasmere.

But what do you hope to come to see? Certainly, a place of natural beauty and a chance to explore rugged fellsides. Perhaps to come to a place of refreshment, to recharge batteries – and that will be a part of our weekend.

But we come as Ministers in Secular Employment, and so we must inevitably ask the questions – where is work to be found here? And how do we encounter God in that work?

As the preparation group began thinking about this, the number of examples kept increasing, and we found ourselves thinking about the competing uses of the land. There is the (obvious) work in the tourism and hospitality industry – pubs, hotels but also craft centres and boat trips of Lake Windermere. We think of those who work on the land in agriculture, forestry and the care of animals, but also in the heavier industries in the larger towns, at Sellafield over the mountains, and, of course, in the current debate about new coal mining.

We plan to get out and about to explore some to these themes, and to meet with people engaged in them and in the discussions around them. The weekend will include the CHRISM AGM. Please see the enclosed flyer for more details – and do sign up and come and join us. Please contact rob.fox36@gmail.com if you need more information.



In the tradition of MSE, what does it mean to go to the hills to encounter God in Work ?

*Annual Conference 23rd – 25th June 2023
Rydal Hall, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 9LX*

Set in over thirty acres of garden, woodland and natural beauty in the Lake District UNESCO World Heritage Site, Rydal Hall is the ideal venue for retreats, events, activity weekends or just a family holiday. With wonderful views over the Rothay valley and with the Fairfield Horseshoe and Nab Scar as a backdrop, the Hall and its grounds are the perfect place to enjoy this beautiful part of the world. www.rydalahall.org

And Finally.....

Holiday

Holiday. Holy day. Time set aside
To watch the view run past,
To sip coffee,
Enter worlds of words,
Listen to random conversations
(Child and man wrestling time).
To see green fields topped by glass,
Stations and warehouses pass,
Towers looming
As we pass into the dark...
Arrival!

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 (see inside rear cover)

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

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