

Ministers-at-Work

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Editorial

Firstly, apologies for the late arrival of this edition – but I hope you find something worth pondering within it. There is certainly quite a bit to consider. The piece this time from the Theology Group explores the *aim* of ministry at work: personally I felt more affinity with the purposes which were identified as fitting with a representative, pastoral and prophetic ministry – but there is no doubt that having a clear purpose is helpful. We are called to point to signs of God’s kingdom around us, and to identify places where institutions and individuals act destructively – but where will we focus – and who (in workplace or church) actually cares?

Much of this edition focuses on food, following the very thought provoking weekend led by Mike Rayner. The broad network involved in food production, the deep relationships shared over biscuits and a cuppa, and the spirituality of peeling a satsuma are just

some of the items included. Wendy White's reflection as part of our final Eucharist is also very much worth reading.

Beyond this, we have the usual notices of forthcoming events, plus an obituary for a valued overseas colleague, and a review of a book by Miroslaw Volf. Hopefully you will find something to stimulate your thinking – and if you feel moved to write something, it will be most welcome.

Pauline Pearson



What is the aim of ministry at work?

Julian Blakemore

This article is based on a discussion at the CHRISM Theology Discussion Group meeting on Wednesday, 22rd March 2023.

I hope we can all agree that our work and our faith are both



important in our lives. The sphere of work is where most of us spend most of our lives and represents the greatest opportunity to influence the lives of others. Whilst some, perhaps conveniently,

To achieve anything, we have to plan for it. This means:

- **Having a clear vision of what you're aiming to do**
- **Deciding priorities**
- **Defining actions and timeframes**
- **Tracking progress along the way**
- **Measuring performance against expectations**
- **Reviewing outcomes and learning lessons**

regard the world of work as separate from their faith, for most people they are inextricably linked. But, in practical terms, how do we minister at work? What are we expected to do?

Having clear aims in life is important. They give us a sense of purpose and enable us to focus our time and energy. They help to

underpin our hopes and dreams and achieve the things that we want to do. They stop us from drifting and wasting opportunities.

Has anyone ever discussed objectives for ministry at work with you?

Personally, I've never found anyone in the Church willing or able to engage on this subject in a meaningful way. When I was on probation at the start of my ministry, the Church chose to assess my worthiness for ordination purely on my activity within the Church and completely ignored my working life.

I recognise that it's difficult because everyone's work situation is different. I totally appreciate that people who are unfamiliar with a particular type, sector or pattern of work might feel uncomfortable talking about it because they don't understand or feel that they have anything to offer. However, the other side of the coin is that those going to work feel that they're on their own from a church point of view and that no one cares whether they succeed or fail. If we never talk about it, we'll never learn.

The case for having clear objectives for ministry

Some are uncomfortable with the idea of setting 'objectives' for ministry because it feels too secular/corporate and prefer to use 'aims' in this context. However, whether we call them aims, goals or objectives, having a clear sense of mission and purpose linked to one's Christian calling, discipleship and values provides meaning and focus for one's ministry at work and is generally considered a good thing. Individuals can express this in different ways but for all, there is a faith-related vision for society, based on shared humanity, and community, that they are working towards and involved in helping to build. This includes the world of work, where their presence has a God-given purpose beyond their contractual obligations and fulfilling the requirements of their job.

Of course, seeking to minister in whatever situation we find ourselves is part of every Christian's calling. Views of ministry include incarnational (being present), transactional (doing) and representative (representing the Christian faith and church to the world of work and vice versa). Opportunities for ministry at work were considered more likely to be reactive rather than planned. However, that does not preclude being proactive where the potential to make a positive difference is identified, for example to try and improve the working environment, help the organisation to improve itself, encourage individuals, or build the team/community.

In a work situation, first and foremost we have to deliver our work objectives. After all, that's what we're there for and others depend on us to do so. Therefore, ministry has to be something we do alongside our work, or an intrinsic part of what we do, or both. We might start off with separate objectives for work and ministry but over time, they should come together as we learn how to 'minister' through our work as part of who we are. The ultimate aim has to be for ministry and work to become so inextricably linked that they cannot be separated. When this happens, the line between work objectives and ministerial objectives can become blurred but that doesn't mean we give up our identity or cease to hold up a light to what's going on. It means that we find ways to call things out or agitate for change using the platforms, processes or channels that are available to us and focus on demonstrating the organisational benefits of building a stronger and more cohesive community amongst those we work with. The ideal is to be able to clearly demonstrate the mutual benefit that is created for individuals, communities and organisations when ministry and work come together as one.

A key point about ministry at work is that it's not just what you do but the way that you do it that matters. The challenge is to make sure that our actions and interventions are coming from the right

place and are properly grounded in Christian love and concern. For this reason, prayer and reflection are crucial to examine our intentions, test that our motives are good and true, understand what God is saying in the situation and what teaching can we apply or take from the situation. Praying at the start of the day provides a solid foundation (I used to pray about the day ahead during my morning rail commute) but shooting off 'arrow' prayers in the midst of specific issues or situations can also help us maintain perspective and give us the strength and courage we need to deal with them in a gracious way. I'd also reflect on the day's events during my journey home, be grateful when things had gone well and try to learn from outcomes that had not gone to plan.

Another valuable input to ministry formation and development can be to seek feedback from those we work with, colleagues, customers, associates, etc. Obviously, this will depend on individual circumstances. As an 'extra-curricular' activity, it will depend on the willingness of others to give of their own time to help us but if they do so, it can be beneficial all round. Not only will the views of those closest to us at work be a gift to us in terms of learning how we impact them and the work environment but will also tell us what we do well and need to maintain as well as areas where we could improve. If we take this feedback on board and take action to develop our capabilities, this could strengthen the overall group and help everyone to work better together.

For an ordained person in the Church of England, the Ordinal provides a robust frame of reference for their ministry, with its threefold emphasis on ministry as blessing (to bless and be blessed), reconciling (to reconcile and be reconciled) and growing (to grow and be grown). These could be applied to any situation and enable an appropriate response but the commitment to do so is in its own way an aim.

It is a positive sign that, for both clerical and lay positions within the Church of England, Ministry Division is starting to pay more attention to learning outcomes from community and work settings in addition to church-based activities in its Ministerial Development Review (MDR) process. Rob Fox's fascinating CHRISM paper is well worth a read on this.¹

There will always be certain aims from a ministerial perspective that will be difficult to fully integrate into secular work objectives, such as prayer, bible study and worship. However, being able to clearly articulate what is distinctive about ministry at work and set out what we need to do to support our work ministries is fundamental, not only in terms of giving meaning and purpose to our role but also enabling us to give an account of ourselves, tell our stories and explain to others what we are about.

What might objectives look like for ministry at work?

When we think about what objectives might look like for exercising a Christian ministry at work, are there specific things we should be doing, for example:

- Preaching the gospel.
- Proselytising.
- Building-up the Church.

Often the aims of ministry at work are couched in such missionary terms but this can be soul destroying for those trying to measure their ministries against these objectives. Clearly, we shouldn't be passing-up opportunities to share our faith with others at work when they arise. However, there are other aspects to ministry – representative, pastoral and prophetic - that shouldn't be

¹ Fox, Rob (2012) CHRISM Paper 13 Initial Ministry Education and MSE
https://chrism.org.uk/paper_13.pdf

overlooked and might be more helpful and productive in our individual situations, such as:

- Bringing the best of ourselves to work everyday.
- Doing the best job we can.
- Setting a good example in specific ways.
- Taking responsibility for helping to create a good culture at work.
- Showing love and respect towards those we work with.
- Getting to know work colleagues as people.
- Encouraging positive attitudes and behaviours amongst others.
- Demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit.
- Supporting work colleagues.
- Helping others to grow and develop.
- Challenging things that don't feel right.
- Praying for your work and those you work with.

Some of these are ongoing, continuous responsibilities. Others will be periodic or ad hoc in nature, prompted by a specific need or issue at work. Some of these things can be done as part of our jobs (i.e. it's about how we do things); some might be matters we follow-up outside of working hours.

One of the key challenges we face is whether MSEs are church or kingdom centred? Our task is not to take God's kingdom out to the World – it's already out there! One of the really important callings of those involved in MSE is discernment, to recognise and point to the presence of God's kingdom, as well highlighting things that are going on that are destructive of it.

We have to find a balance between faith and work – in the end the relationship should be seamless so we can't tell where one stops and

the other begins, it's just simply who we are. Then we can be said to be living out our faith at work.

A helpful approach to meaningful objective setting

It is clear that there is no single blueprint that would work for everyone. For those who feel they would benefit from a more systematic approach, one method of introducing structure to what we want to do is the use of **S-M-A-R-T** objectives based on the acronym developed by George Doran in 1981, which stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**imely (i.e. time-bound).² This approach has subsequently been expanded to **S-M-A-R-T-E-R** goal setting by adding two further steps, **E**valuate and **R**ewind, at the end. This kind of easy to remember framework can provide structure and discipline to what we set out to do. When we don't define, measure and track something, it becomes far easier to simply put things off, or convince ourselves that we've made more progress than we really have.

Does this mean that every aspect of our lives should be nailed down and subject to a set of objectives? Of course not. Some things in life can't be planned to that extent – such as falling in love, predicting the weather, or winning the lottery. There also has to be room for spontaneity and space to relax for the sake of our wellbeing. But thinking about the things that really matter to us in life and having clear aims for them can be useful to help us make progress and avoid procrastination that can leave us with feelings of regret, uncertainty, or unfulfillment.

Is this sort of approach appropriate for ministry at work? The proof of a pudding is in the eating – we shouldn't simply assume that tools

² Doran, G. T. (1981). "There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives", *Management Review*, Vol. 70, Issue 11, pp. 35-36.

developed in the secular world have no application and cannot be used for spiritual purposes.

Biblical perspectives

At work, we have objectives and our performance is measured against them. They define our roles and responsibilities. They bring recognition for a job well done or feedback/constructive criticism when things don't go so well. In paid employment, they also feed-in to our reward and career progression.

Jesus tended to call people away from work rather than to it but:

- He acknowledged the work that people do:
 - in his parables, e.g. the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20.1-16), the sower (Matt. 13.1-23; cf. Mk. 4.1-20; Lk. 8.4-15) and bankers in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25.14-30);
 - in his “I am” sayings, e.g. the good shepherd (Jn. 10.11-18), the vinedresser (Jn. 15.1-11).
- He interacted with workers and brought out the best in them, e.g. the tax collector Zacchaeus (Lk. 19.1-10) and the Pharisee Nicodemus (Jn. 3.1-21; 7.50-51; 19.39-42).
- He turned up where people were working and on one occasion even deigned to tell fishermen how to fish! (Lk. 5.4-11; Jn. 21.4-8).
- Some of the disciples went back to fishing for a while after Jesus' death (Jn. 21.1-13).

St. Paul talks about supporting his ministry through his work as a tentmaker (Acts 18.1-4; cf. 2 Thess. 3.8). A narrow interpretation of the text suggests that he did not see his work as part of his ministry but simply as a means to an end. An alternative reading of the text is that he saw his work as an integral part of his ministry, that they went hand-in-hand and he couldn't do one without the other.

When Jesus commissioned his disciples and sent them out, e.g. the seventy-two (Luke 10-11) and the eleven (Matt. 28.16-20), he doesn't set detailed objectives but paints a vision for them.

The vision is hugely ambitious and inspiring but in terms of goals, is not specific, not easy to measure, not something any of them can achieve on their own, not tailored to their situations, and not time-bound.

How then are we supposed to deliver it? Who sets our objectives?

- Jesus trusts his followers to add the detail in ways that are meaningful in their particular situation – could be risky without some oversight!
- We look to all Jesus' teaching to help us, especially what he has to say about the Kingdom of God and how love of God and our neighbour should influence everything we do.
- Who agrees our objectives for ministry at work and oversees what we're doing? Does anyone even care?

What next?

The discussion prompted thoughts about how the church can be more informed about ministry at work. This had a positive outcome in that Jim Francis shared a learning module on MSE that he had developed some time ago, with a view, at that time, of partnering with the University of Bangor. The idea that this could be updated and potentially be offered to one or more TEIs (Theological Education Institutions) in a matter of months is an exciting prospect. This opportunity is being actively explored.

Questions for discussion:

1. How helpful is it for us to have clear objectives for ministry at work?
2. Does anyone set objectives with us and hold us to account?
 - God?

- Church?
 - Self?
 - Support Network?
3. Would a more structured approach be beneficial in giving focus to ministry at work?

Further reading

Francis, James M.M. (2021), Busking the Gospel, Ordained Ministry in Secular Employment. Sacristy Press, Durham.

Lees, John (2018), Self-Supporting Ministry, A Practical Guide. SPCK, London.



Reflective weekend 2023

The 2023 Reflective weekend took place from 10th - 12th February at Sarum College, Salisbury. Led by Mike Rayner, it considered how Food and Faith interact. The programme included thinking about the work of food production and policy, considering sustainability, food as symbol in the bible, our own regional foods (some creative thinking there!) and Eucharist in secular spaces. Some pictures, reflections and poetry arising from the event follow...



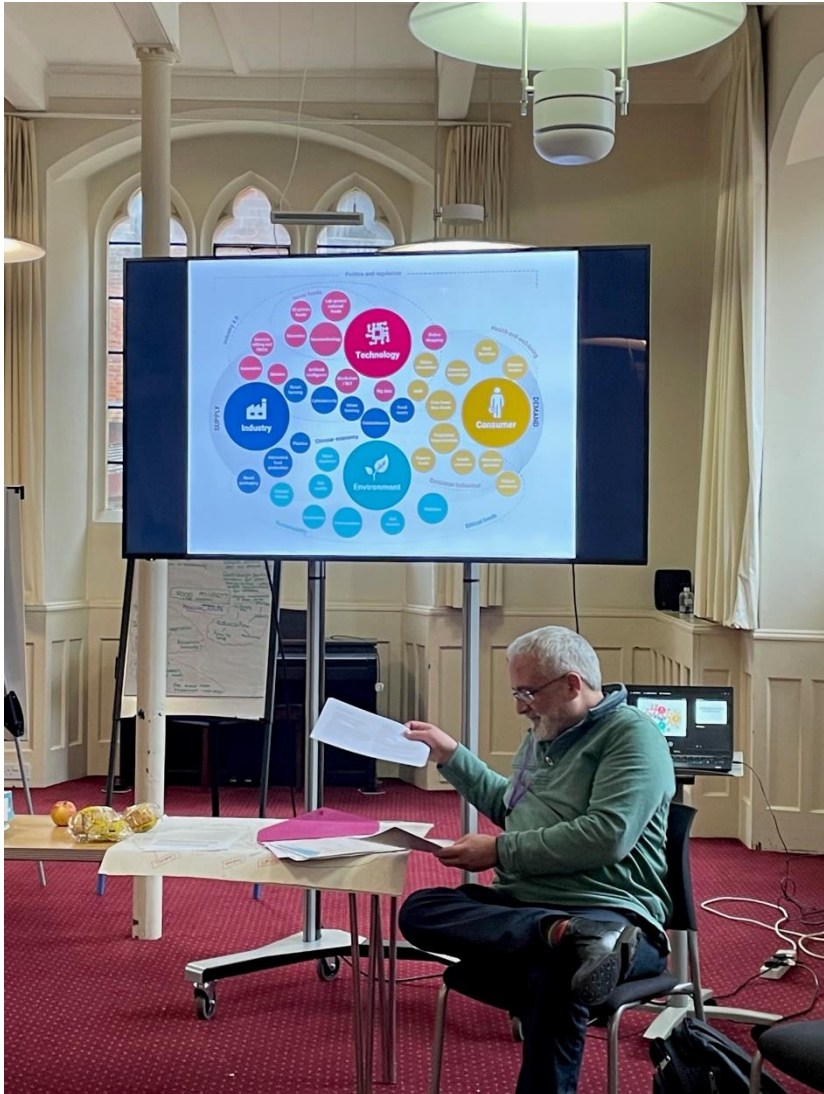


Who has worked in the food industry? - *Phil Aspinall*

It was a simple enough question from Mike Rayner during the Sarum Weekend, and several of us who had, gave a few examples from our working lives. But it started me thinking, and the number of connections I have found has grown and grown. To use another food image : "MSE refreshes the parts other ministries cannot reach". And it really did demonstrate that the networks of the industries involved with food are as complex as the diagrams Mike showed us

The list began easily enough with the obvious example of work for both UK sugar producers : running training on all seven of the sugar beet factories of British Sugar over a 15 year period and some time at the sugar cane factory in London. Over this time the factories expanded to produce bioethanol from sugar beet as a substitute for petrol and to generate natural gas from organic waste. At one factory, they established what I believe was the largest greenhouse in the EU to grow tomatoes, using waste heat to extend the growing season, and waste carbon dioxide to increase the concentration in the air and promote growth – tomatoes love it. Other by-products from the process include: selling the soil washed off the sugar beet as top soil and using the organic residues for making animal feed. Both of these take us back to the start of the food cycle; the process is far from linear.





My other work in food production included some time on a factory making instant coffee in Germany (and learning where they get the flavour from before they put it into the jar, and that coffee can blow up at one stage in the production cycle). And another job involved

pet food production in Melton Mowbray (disturbingly close to the pork pie factory).

In my time at Courtaulds in Coventry, we were developing KESP (Courtaulds Edible Spun Protein) - a parallel development to Quorn as a vegetarian alternative. With our technologies for manufacturing textile fibres, it was a step in the logic to spin "meat" fibres. We were also spinning Planet synthetic cigarettes, if you remember these during their brief existence (not quite food). On a related theme we used to spin filter tow for cigarette tips. There was also a plant in Derby which made a material called Celacol which could be used as a binder in burgers. We also had a factory in Leek which, as one of its products, made the citrus fruit aromas used in cleaning agents – also not really food. A group of us made a visit there during a previous CHRISM weekend.

Courtaulds was also a major producer of coatings of many sorts, including marine and building paints. I worked on the factory in East London making internal coatings to protect drinks cans from cola (and learnt about the chemistry needed to achieve this). This was another place we visited during a CHRISM weekend. Related to this, I did one job on a factory in the west of Ireland, which produced all



the concentrate for cola making plants around Europe - I was not allowed in the secret room where they actually made up the recipe, although I do recall the large tank of phosphoric acid adjacent to the building. I also worked on a plant in Italy which made the coating to protect cans from Italian tinned tomatoes. Thinking of other coatings, I spent some time on various powder coatings factories, used for diverse "white goods" including refrigerators - obviously also needed to keep food fresh.

Other forms of packaging are also used to preserve freshness and Courtaulds made several of these. I did some jobs on the Cellophane factory, adjacent to the M5 in Somerset (known by its pervasive odour - and for the use of the distinctive yellow film on Lucozade bottles) and I was involved in polypropylene film production in Swindon. I have subsequently worked for a major European polythene producer in both Germany, France and Italy.

The network of industries connected with food production spreads even wider. I did consultancy work at a weed killer factory near Dartford and have had various contacts with fertiliser production. In my university days I had a placement working on a research facility in the Netherlands, studying surfactants - helpful for doing the washing up after the meal. An even odder food connection came while working on a pharmaceutical plant making the 'flu vaccine - eggs are a key raw material, on which the virus is grown. Even when I was constructing plants to make carbon fibres, we bought the ovens for the first stage of the conversion process, from a well-established manufacturer of pizza ovens in the USA. I could also mention my work in the oil and gas industries, providing the fuels needed to produce, transport, cook, and refrigerate the food we eat (and the source of much packaging).

I have also worked for both Thames Water and Severn Trent on safety and environmental studies for sewerage plants - perhaps the ultimate end of the food cycle ! But no - the slurry from these works is used as fertiliser on the fields to produce crops - which takes us back to the beginning - another loop in the cycles of the food process.



The Kingdom of Heaven is like....Communion in the Builders' Hut - *Rev Alison Finch*



At the last CHRISM weekend in Sarum College, we broke out into small groups and discussed 'Communion in different places.' In my group I shared this story.

For 10 years I was a full time Town Centre Chaplain in Colchester and went into work places all over the town, including shops, offices and the police. One of my many privileges was to go every Thursday to a builders Yard, there was a tea break at 11 o'clock, so once I'd walked around the site and spoke to the Manager's and other staff. I would walk, with hard toed boots and a safety hat, over to the builder's hut, where the kettle would be on the boil. The guys working there would gather, turn round the 'naughty' calendars, tell each other the 'padre' was coming and to mind their language and the scene was set.

In I'd walk, usually with a grin on my face and there would be an empty seat waiting. Then the teas would appear and a packet of

Rich Tea biscuits, maybe if it was someone's birthday there would be doughnuts! This biscuits and the tea were their 'bread and wine' because over that time in their hut, there was real communion, real sharing of love and tears, real confession and forgiveness, a discussion on current issues and church affairs, and an inclusivity that puts the Church to shame. In the end I would give them a Blessing and send them out to 'live and work' in this place that God has sent them.

Over the years I saw many of the builders change. Some came to faith, some thanked me for saving their relationships. Some just walked away every Thursday with a smile, knowing they were loved and respected. To me this was real communion, a real sense of being where Jesus would have been, sharing tea and biscuits in a builder's hut somewhere in Galilee.

Reflection on the weekend: Food as a pawn in the power game - Wendy White

Matthew 6: 25-34. Romans 8: 18-25

It's quite a challenge to reflect on a weekend, particularly when much of it needs to be done in advance. As I began to pull threads together I realise this is more like a 7th session: Food as a pawn in the power game.

So, to begin:-

'God will take care of all our wants, we have no need to fret or worry about food or clothing'

Really?!

We've spent the past 2 days exploring food, literally, in terms of what we eat, its quality and the issues of justice around food and also how we respond to food.

And our response to food can be very like our response to sex. I read a passage many years ago by CS Lewis, (*Mere Christianity*):

*“There is nothing to be ashamed of in enjoying your food: there would be everything to be ashamed of if half the world made food the main interest of their lives and spent their time looking at pictures of food and dribbling and smacking their lips.... We grow up surrounded by propaganda in favour of unchastity. There are people who want to keep our sex instinct inflamed in order to make money out of us. Because, of course, **a man with an obsession is a man who has very little sales-resistance**”*

He was talking about pornography, and how distorted it was that people would buy pictures and books and watch films about sex. It had taken something beautiful and basic and exploited it to the lowest common denominator for economic gain, which also made it both accessible and remote. I wonder sometimes how he would have responded to the shelves upon shelves of books about food, about cooking, the television programmes, with their glossy pictures, perfect presentation and even celebrities. It takes something beautiful and fundamental and then, in many cases, distorts it and makes it both accessible and remote – something to be longed for but something most of us feel we couldn’t achieve (my cakes don’t look like the pictures!). And, as has been mentioned, we have Facebook posts where ‘friends’ show us the heaped plates they are sitting down to. Over the past few months Air-Fryers have been keeping electrical and cookware retailers in business.

Food, in much of the western world at least has moved beyond necessity and become lifestyle choice. Part of the latest accessory – the choice between a Thai style restaurant or Lebanese.

And if you can’t aim for the giddy heights of haute cuisine, or organic produce – then we are offered intense competition between Kentucky, Dominos, McDonalds and your local chippy.

And some aspects of this economy are beautiful, in that it gives us access to so many other cultures, but it is also capable of becoming just another 'Need' that others around us are ready to exploit at a moments notice.



This weekend we've thought about food as symbol too, and we can explore food related illnesses – anorexia etc. or food as a substitute for love, affection, touch.



Food has moved beyond being a core necessity, a matter of nourishing the body, moved beyond being a wonderful added extra that nourishes wellbeing, and in so many places it has become something more to worry about. We may be judged by what we offer our guests, or where we host our parties, what wine we serve. In a theological context Jesus' last meal has become profoundly symbolic and nourishing. But it has also been distorted by some, and over the centuries, used as a barrier, an exercise of power, of exclusion.

And, to return to the scripture, we have long since moved into the 'want' from 'need' approach to clothing. Our clothing, we are told, should reflect us, our personalities, our aspirations and our wealth.

I'm guessing that all of this is something you have reflected on, at least in part, over this weekend and before, and we might be taking away a resolve to do better in our choices: – eating for true nourishment rather than quantity, shopping ethically, fighting the

many layers of additives and sugar which have distorted our taste buds.

And much of the time, if we are honest,we shall fail.

Whether we like it or not we live in an economy which assumes the market will grow ever bigger. We live in an economy that has to create markets to expand. We live in an economy where, if we have enough, we need convincing we need more, or better or bigger. And companies are very good at persuading us of this. Alongside all the software that enables and facilitates communication there are vast departments purely geared to adding the tweaks to programmes, in addition to straight advertising, to persuade us that this is all good. And they, in turn, employ expert psychologists who fine-tune the targeting.

So, if we return to God's word about providing does that give us strength to stop this, to stop being endless consumers and to focus on what truly nourishes? Yes.....but.



If we take this superficially we could sit back and assume all we need, at least the basic essentials, would fall in our laps with no effort on our part. Or we can be abstract and make it purely spiritual and then it becomes empty to those in real physical need.

Tell that to the thousands queuing at the food banks, or indeed the food banks themselves, struggling to find enough donations, enough supplies, to enable them to help others.

Our passage isn't just telling us that God is the great sugar-daddy, this passage says something else too:

'strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness' (NRSV). And in this context 'righteousness' is a word allied to justice.

So what might this striving look like?

Our passage from Romans reinforces the idea of God-given hope. If we remember the passages in Acts that speak of the first communities of Christ followers – we hear that none went in need, good were shared. And Paul himself worked, as a tentmaker so he would not be a burden. So, as many churches and communities do – we organise food banks, we gather food and encourage others. But justice, justice around food (and clothing) has to be so much more: and that's where Mike's call to help him, and others, focus on how the bishops might respond is important. We can, to borrow a phrase, 'speak truth to power': challenge why the food banks are needed, why GPs in Scotland are already seeing signs of malnutrition as people buy cheaper processed food, missing vital minerals and vitamins. We can support the fight for fair wages, we can challenge the illusion of an ever-increasing market for goods, and work towards a steady state economy. We can fight for fair trade and recognise that so much of our standard of living is at the expense of those in other countries.

As we near the end of our time together one of the strongest memories for me, I suspect, in addition to the warmth of this community, is a calling back to hope and to discernment.

Food is such a core part of our being that we need for ourselves to re-see and acknowledge what we are eating, (and how it reached us), and how we can enable the same for others. If we can strive, with open eyes, that see through so much of the advertising and manipulation, then not only are we healthier, but we are striving for a justice, a righteousness that will feed and free others, and in the process allow God and our planet to provide for us.

And rather than just assume that we are fine now, and can obtain more when we need it by our own strength and bargaining power, we have a reminder that food, and all we need, comes to us by grace. Amen



Three International meetings for the price of one ! - *Phil Aspinall*

At the end of January I went to visit the headquarters of the French Worker Priests in Montreuil, and for an extended weekend in Paris. The main purpose was to join in the preparation for this year's international conference, but I ended up having three meetings for the price of one.

The **Planning for the International Meeting** involved five representatives, from Germany, France, the Netherlands and UK. We assembled for dinner on the Friday evening and managed to achieve our task in three hours on the Saturday morning.

The 2023 conference will take place from Friday 8th - Sunday 10th September in Lille, in northern France. Two possible venues in the city (close to both train stations) are being explored - the cost for the weekend is expected to be € 100 - € 150. Additional nights' accommodation should also be possible if you wish to extend your stay.

The overall theme proposed will be "What changes do we experience in our work today?" More details to follow, but we are encouraged to reflect on our relation with our colleagues, their concerns and their support networks. Each participant will be invited to prepare a half-page summary of their thoughts on this theme. It will of course be very easy to go there directly on Eurostar. Do please put these dates in your diary and consider coming to join the event. Please contact Phil Aspinall if you are interested.

The Annual conference of French Working Worker Priests (POAP) was also planned for this same weekend in January, and a further four members of this group arrived for Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning - we Europeans were invited to participate with

them. Those present included: a Chef at a hostel for the unemployed, the Director of a medical /social care business, a cattle farmer, an Amazon warehouse worker, an ambulance driver, a house cleaner for old people - a great breadth of employment and experience. Their chosen theme was "Fraternité" which took us in a variety of directions of very deep reflections, particularly exploring community at work. (It was suggested that we should speak of "community" as a more inclusive alternative to Fraternité).

We shared a Eucharist on Saturday evening, sitting around the table where we had been working, before going out for a Japanese meal just down the road in the backstreets of Montreuil. Our other meals were prepared by Anne Chantal, the administrator of the national body of the worker priests.

On the Sunday morning we continued our theme and shared intense reflections / bible study using, perhaps predictably, Genesis 3 (using a very loose and poetical translation) and the encounters of Jesus in Samaria from John 4 - 1-12 in the Bayard translation. The French had also selected other texts, from Jose Pagola: "Jesus – an historical



approximation" and Eloi Leclerc: "The wisdom of the poor one of Assisi" continuing our theme of Community and relationships.

There was a bonus of a **Day meeting of the Worker Priests of the Ile de France** who had decided to come at short notice on the Saturday! We were invited to join them for an excellent lunch prepared by one of the POAP who works as a chef - a very robust cassoulet. They were a group of about 12, much older, retired worker priests from the region, who then held their own meeting, but we had a good chance to catch up over themal.

The theme of changes at work permeated the whole weekend, as we were surrounded by the atmosphere of protest and strikes in France over the proposed increase in retirement age from 62 to 64. On the following Tuesday, much of the Paris transport system was shut down and there was a protest march of some 100,000 people.

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.

Obituary: Davis Fisher

We have just heard the sad news that the Rev. Davis L. Fisher died on the 16th July 2022. Only a handful of CHRISM members had met him, but a major focus of his ministry was the promotion of a bi-vocational approach to ministry. He formed the national organisation, NASSAM, (The National Association of Self Supporting Active Ministry) within the American Episcopal Church. His aim was to encourage the self-supporting ministry that he believed was essential to the future of the church.

He organised many annual conferences in conjunction with the sister organisation of the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers. Several of these were in the Chicago area at the huge Seminary of Our Lady of the Lake at Mundelein and were a base for encouraging the growth of SSM in the Chicago Diocese.



After growing up in the Chicago area, Davis attended Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis., and The General Theological Seminary in New York. He later received an M.B.A. from the University of Chicago and a Master's Degree from Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill. Davis's 55 years as an Episcopal priest were spent as an Associate Priest in several Chicago area churches as well as interim director for Cathedral Shelter, a charity that serves the homeless.

While serving as a priest, Davis's business career included banking and trust management, sales training, money research, presentations, and consulting. He founded Moneytree Consulting to help people explore their personal relationship to money and determine how money impacts relationships, behavior and decisions. Many of Davis's money insights came from extensive interviews with individuals, from multi-millionaires to people living in poverty, and from his personal meeting with Mother Teresa and his work among the poor in Haiti, India and Africa.

It was a privilege to have known him and worked with him. With his wry wit and endless repertoire of stories and anecdotes, he was seldom without words. Davis and Linda moved to Portland, Ore., in 2013. As he had all his life, Davis relished exploring a new place, meeting new people, and learning their stories...and looking for a room full of people he didn't yet know.

A memorial service was held at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Evanston, Ill.

Taken from the Obituary Published by The Oregonian from Jul. 21 to Jul. 24, 2022.

Book Review

“A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good”, Miroslav Volf, Brazos Press, 2011;

ISBN 978-1-58743-343-6: pp167.

Miroslav Volf is a Croatian Protestant theologian and public intellectual, and Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture at Yale University. He previously taught at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in his

native Osijek, Croatia, and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

This work sums up in accessible form results from many years of Volf's research, exploring the place and role of Christ's followers in pluralistic societies today. It argues against both the exclusion of religion from public space and saturation by a single religion, sketching a vision of a publicly engaged Christian faith that affirms pluralism as a political project. It can be described as pivotal in that Volf's key themes and concepts are explained and applied to the book's message, as such this is a book from which MSEs can learn much.

Volf's background is unusual in Western Protestant circles (Croatia is predominantly Roman Catholic, with historic tensions around Serbian nationalism and Orthodoxy, and Islam), and being nurtured in a minority informs his approach to public faith. As he points out, far from being in retreat, which is the experience of Churches in much of Europe, Christianity is in fact vibrant and flourishing in many parts of the world, in particular regions where it is a minority faith. This experience, he suggests, helps Christian minorities develop effective ways of living out a public faith effectively.

The book itself comprises 7 chapters, in 2 parts: 'Countering Faith's malfunctions' and 'Engaging Faith', topped and tailed with an Introduction and Conclusion. Volf foundational reasoning is set out in the Introduction:

"Christ is God's Word and God's Lamb, come into the world for the good of all people, who are all God's creatures and loved by God" (my emphasis). Christ is not for Christians only.

"Christ came to redeem the world by preaching, actively helping people, and dying a criminal's death for the ungodly. In all aspects of his work, he was a bringer of grace."

“When it comes to life in the world, to follow Christ is to care for others (as well as ourselves) and work towards their flourishing... A vision of human flourishing and the common good is the main thing the Christian faith brings into the public debate.”

“Since the world is God’s creation and since the Word came to his own even if his own did not accept him (John 1:11), the proper stance of Christians toward the larger culture cannot be that of unmitigated opposition or whole-scale transformation.” Chapter 5 develops what Volf calls the “more complex attitude” required, accepting, rejecting, learning from, subverting, transforming, and putting to better use. Conversely, nor is the proper stance of Christians conformity with the larger culture.

“The way Christians work towards human flourishing is not by imposing on others their vision of human flourishing and the common good but by bearing witness to Christ”, by deed and word.

“Christ has not come with a blueprint for political arrangements; many kinds ... are compatible with Christian faith. Christ’s



command (cf. Matthew 7:12) entails that Christians grant to other religious communities the same religious and political freedoms that they claim for themselves.”

A key concept for Volf is that Christian faith malfunctions when it does not observe the above precepts, and in the first 3 chapters he sets out how this can happen. Part of this, he considers, stems from the difference between prophetic and mystical religions, and for Volf Christianity is firmly the former. A malfunction arises when an ascent to God is not followed by a return to the (real) world. Ascent on its own is a gratifying experience for the believer but does not itself translate into working for human flourishing as the common good. He cites Moses’ ascent to the mountain and return with God’s commandments, and Jesus preparing for his public ministry by spending 40 days in the wilderness, as examples of how the two must be present. He goes further, examining what he calls ascent malfunctions (“Functional Reduction” and “Idolatric Substitution”) and return malfunctions: “Idleness of Faith” (the experience of ascent is not translated into living in the world), and “Coerciveness of Faith” (seeking to impose our beliefs on others).

The concept of idleness is further developed in Chapter 2, where Volf suggests 3 reasons why faith may be idle. Firstly, a believer may find the demands of faith too challenging, and so pick and choose what they will take up (a “cafeteria” approach). Secondly, believers may feel constrained by the social and economic systems, small and large, that they live in, and conform to these rather than the faith they profess. Thirdly, the faith is not applied to new circumstances or does not appear relevant to contemporary issues. Volf goes on to explain 4 ways in which he considers faith applies to our daily lives and work: Blessing (what does it mean to be a success?), Deliverance (how do we handle failure?), Guidance (what should I do, and what can I leave undone?), and Meaning (why should I engage in the activity in the first place?)

Chapter 3 is titled “Coerciveness”, which Volf points out has historically been a problem for Christianity. Here he introduces and explains the concepts of thin and thick faith; thin when faith is superficial and not embedded in how we live daily, thick when it is. Key is the point that Christians should not seek to impose their own faith and its demands on others. Persuasion yes, coercion no.

In Chapter 4 Volf sets out what he means by human flourishing. Here he contrasts the prevailing understanding within Western culture with the Christian understanding. The former, he avers, centres on individual experiential satisfaction, we flourish as individuals when we enjoy satisfying experiences. In contrast, Volf sets out the Christian vision of the Love of God and Universal Solidarity, “human beings flourish and are truly happy when they center their lives on God.” He emphasises that the vision of human flourishing is at the heart of Christianity, as it is with the other monotheistic faiths. Central to this is loving God and loving neighbour. Most malfunctions of faith, he says, are rooted in failing to love either God, our neighbour, or both. Translating this to how we live out our faith, we need to explicate how loving God relates to human flourishing in real issues facing the world today. Secondly, we need to make plausible that loving God and neighbour are key to human flourishing. Thirdly, Christians need to actually believe this themselves to be able to credibly explain it to others.

Part 2, Engaged Faith, looks at the practicalities of living out a public faith. Chapter 5, Identity and Difference, stresses the importance of our identity as followers of Christ and members of the society in which we live. That we share both is important to being able to live our faith publicly. Volf stresses that Christians should be realistic about the influence they have, which is not what it was when Christendom was more than a concept. At the same time, we should not be marginalised, conceding to leaving our faith at the door when we participate in society. Our faith is a central part of

our identity, so a question we can ask of those who wish us to set it aside is: 'what are you leaving at the door?'

Volf sets out 4 features of contemporary societies that provide the framework for how Christian communities should understand their identity in today's world and how they should promote human flourishing and the common good.

Firstly, voluntarism. Using Max Weber's differentiation between Church and Sect, Volf observes that, in effect, only sects exist in contemporary Western societies. People are 'clubbable' and aggregate around shared beliefs, assumptions and activities, rather than are born into a shared set of norms and values.

Secondly, difference. All those born into a church are members of it, sharing norms and values; in contrast members of a sect are characterised by association through religious and ethical qualification. What makes a sect a sect is its difference from other sects. For Volf this is positive: "The following principle stands: whoever wants the Christian communities to exist must want their difference from the surrounding culture, not their blending into it." Christian communities should therefore practice sensitive boundary maintenance, allowing movement into (and out of) the community while pointing up the differences. Whilst he doesn't quote Paul, Volf clearly has in mind his injunction not to be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of your minds (Romans 12:2).



Thirdly, pluralism. Volf points out that we live in an increasingly pluralistic world, where competing cultural worlds, sects, exist within overarching national and global frameworks, “Simple denial or affirmation of such a world is impossible. Similarly, the simple claim that the Christian message is (or can be made) intelligible to ‘the world’ will not do. We need more complex ways of thinking about the relation to culture to take into account the complex and rapidly changing plurality of cultural worlds...”

Fourthly, relative self-sufficiency. Continuing to use the model of church (at the centre of society) and sect (at the margin), Volf notes that the ‘traditional view of the former entering into compromises with society in order to retain influence, while the latter does not, retaining ‘purity’ while surrendering influence, is no longer plausible. He notes that “functional differentiation” within society has led to the growth of self-maintaining sub-systems, specialising in particular areas, such as health, education, communication. Some of these, for example communication, are increasingly global, rather than local, with control being diffuse, exercised, if at all, by multiple and often competing groups and agencies. Christian communities are but one type of these, competing for influence alongside many others. “For comprehensive change ... Christian communities must learn how to work vigorously for the limited change that is possible, to mourn over persistent and seemingly ineradicable evils, and to celebrate the good wherever it happens and whoever its agents are.”

Within this context, Volf identifies 3 ways in which Christian communities have sought to engage with contemporary cultures, and then proposes a 4th, “better”, way. Firstly, the Liberal approach: accommodation. This he sees as wrong-headed “for at least two reasons.” First, the fast pace of cultural change means that whatever is accommodated to is soon out of date. Second, by accommodating Christian communities are signing up to what they have not shaped and have very little influence over, so giving up

promoting change towards a Christian view of human flourishing. The post-Liberal programme he describes as reversing the direction of conformation. "Instead of translating the biblical message into the conceptualities of the culture one inhabits, as liberal theology sought to do, Christians should redescribe the world anew with the help of the biblical story. ... Christians should interpret the world and act in it in the light of that story." (Echoes here of CHRISM's motto). The danger Volf sees here is that by inhabiting the biblical story Christians may find dialogue with the surrounding culture, increasingly unfamiliar with that story, difficult. To overcome this there should be at least some "cultural-linguistic" compatibility between the Christian community and surrounding culture, which should be nurtured, and Christians should be ready to listen and learn from the surrounding culture. Thirdly, the separatist programme: separation from the world, Christian communities as "islands in the sea of worldliness." Citing Bonhoeffer, Volf points out that this misunderstands the concept of being in the world but not of it. While Christian difference essential, it should always be internal to a given cultural world.

"Internal difference" is what Volf sees as a "better way." He uses and number of historical and biblical examples of how Christians should remain within their cultural setting while being differentiated from it where necessary, noting that there are many practices that we can join in wholeheartedly and others that we should shun, but always maintain a listening dialogue. "To become a Christian means to divert without leaving. To live as a Christian means to keep inserting a difference into a given culture, without ever stepping outside that culture to do so."

Volf ends the chapter with "Two Noes and One Yes." No to total transformation and accommodation, yes to engagement.

In chapter 6, Volf examines sharing wisdom, helpfully asking (and answering) "What is Wisdom?" Christians, he notes, have long

understood their faith to be a way of life, founded on wisdom, but also as 'nuggets' that may be relevant in a given context. The danger with that latter is that these nuggets can be treated as a pick and mix and taken out of context. Crucially, the wisdom of faith is there to be shared. Here Volf makes the point that Christians should not think they have a monopoly on wisdom but recognise and learn from wisdom wherever it is found. Why share wisdom? First, because Christians have an obligation to do so; we have been sent out to proclaim the good news of Christ. Second, this obligation is an expression of love for our neighbours; ultimately, we don't share wisdom out of obedience but love for our neighbours. The wisdom we share is not our own; we don't own or originate it. It is a gift freely given to us and which we freely share with others. Neither does it cease to dwell in us when we share it; Volf likens sharing wisdom to playing a piece of music for friend – they share the joy of hearing it, yet we retain the gift of being able to share it. Conversely, while the self is a giver of wisdom, the other must be a receiver in order to enjoy, appreciate, the gift, and we ourselves are receivers of wisdom in the act of sharing it. We learn from the giving.

The final chapter is titled "Public Engagement", and here Volf brings together the themes he has developed and explained. He begins by outlining the secularisation thesis, that religion will wither away in the face of reason and rationality. However, it has proved wrong: religion is flourishing globally, notwithstanding regions of apparent decline and retrenchment. The world we inhabit is characterised by religious diversity, and "the workplace is a good site to observe the growing significance of religious plurality." (I recall rewarding conversations with the group of Hindu colleagues who would meet for lunch in a common area, sharing what each had brought). Within this context Volf affirms that it is important to speak with one's own, authentic, voice, exchanging gifts of wisdom with religious and secular communities alike. There is and will be

disagreement, but an essential part of being authentically Christian is to recognise that we do not have a monopoly on wisdom, and respect others' right to disagree with us. It is by respecting the right to be distinctive that we will earn the right to speak.

Volf refers to and is clearly influenced by some of the great Protestant minds of the 20th century: Bonhoeffer, Niebuhr, Barth, Hauerwas and Moltmann (under whom he studied). What makes Volf distinctive is the economical and practical way he explains himself. He packs an enormous amount into what is a relatively short book, with not an unnecessary word. His approach, foundations and concepts sit well with Ministry in Secular Employment, and I can't wait to get into further works from him.

Rob Fox

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.

Rev'd Julian Blakemore

Coming soon!

“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



CHRISM AGM

Sunday 25 June 2023 9.15am

As usual, AGM will form part of the Annual Conference. We will hold it in hybrid format so that anyone wishing to join us on Zoom will be able to do so. We hope it may be possible for some overseas members to participate. If you would like the Zoom link, please let Margaret Trivasse know (email: margtriv@yahoo.co.uk).

And Finally.....

Gratitude for the Satsuma - Revd Jo Thomas



Nestled, like a treasure.
Wrapped tight.
Golden orb of orange.
Waxed,
Glistening,
Softly waiting.

Just the tiniest hint of tang,
Before you burst forth,
With extravagant aroma.
Filling the air with your life giving.
Juices squirting, on my tongue.

Ruminating, I ponder,
On your tiny sacrifice.
Consumed.
Discarded now.
Seeds lost.

Your tiny life packaged
Designed for life-giving,
My wellbeing dependent

Your life, for my life.

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.

Membership Secretary:

Sue Cossey 1 Bye Mead, Emerson's Green, Bristol, BS16 7DL
Retired Insurance underwriter sue.cossey@yahoo.co.uk 0117 957 4267

Submissions for the Journal (if electronic:
.txt, .rtf, or .doc format) should be sent to:

The Journal Editor
3 Belle Grove Place, Spital Tongues,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4LH

E-mail: Pauline.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk

Visit the CHRISM website:

www.chrism.org.uk

Chrism Committee Members:

Moderators

Catherine Binns 45 Riverstone Bridge, Littleborough, OL15 8JF
Chaplain (NHS) revcathfrog@talktalk.net 07843 388562

Nicky von Benzon 24 Little Penny Rope, Pershore, WR10 1 QN
Family Mediator nicky5319@outlook.com 07503 002220

Hugh Lee (Emeritus) 64 Observatory Street, Oxford, OX2 6EP
Energy Economist hugh.lee@btinternet.com

Secretary

Margaret Trivasse 114 Valley Mill Lane, Bury, BL9 9BY
Counsellor (Refugees) margtriv@yahoo.co.uk 07796 366220

Treasurer

Rob Fox 15 St Ronan's Drive, Seaton Sluice, Whitley Bay,
Northumberland, NE26 4JW
rob.fox36@gmail.com

Journal Editor

Pauline Pearson 3 Belle Grove Place, Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE2 4LH Pauline.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk
0775 3744349

Committee Members

Phil Aspinall 139 Wiltshire Court, Nod Rise, Coventry, CV5
Process Risk Consultant 7JP philaspinall840@gmail.com 024 7646 7509

Margaret Joachim 8 Newburgh Road, London, W3 6DQ
Student and volunteer margaret.joachim@london.anglican.org
02087234514

Ali Creasey

IT project manager totleyassociate@gmail.com 07496 451687

Julian Blakemore 62 Lomond Way, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 6BT
Banking rev.julian.e.blakemore@gmail.com 07889431695

Web Master

Martin Dryden Mont Ube House, St Clement, Jersey, JE2 6QT
Director, Finance Co. mont.ube.jsy@gmail.com

Patron

**The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of
Canterbury**