

Ministers-at-Work

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Copy deadline for next edition: Saturday 5 April 2025

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Editorial

As I write, the US President-elect, Donald Trump, has stated his intention to take control of Greenland, Elon Musk has questioned whether the United States should “liberate the people of Britain from their tyrannical government”, Meta (including Facebook and Instagram) is ending its fact-checking programme in favour of a 'community notes' system like X's – all in the name of free speech. 2025 had a strange and worrying beginning.

International law, integrity, truth and trust all seem at risk on many fronts. Scapegoating and aggression are very common. Never has the hope and light of our faith been more needed. Events may tempt us to gloom and even despair but giving in is not an option. We can each make a difference in our daily living and working, and surely must not be discouraged by the apparent smallness of our individual impact. It is far better to light a candle than curse the darkness, as the proverb reminds us.

With this in mind, the two main articles highlight topical concerns – the claims of the “woke agenda” and the injustices and divisions in society. Our European friends at their recent conference were also considering some of these issues within their daily living and local communities. What strength and encouragement can come from meeting others in similar situations but with different perspectives. The papers from the conference remind us of how good it is to meet fellow MSEs face to face.

So, do book a place for the reflective weekend and consider any preferences about timing and arrangements of our meetings. Do send me any thoughts on this and any suggestions for good places to meet. As St Paul exhorted us, let's encourage one another and build up each other through 2025.

Finally, members will be sad to hear the news that Stan Frost has died. Stan has been an active CHRISM member since the early days and will be fondly remembered by many now. We hope to publish a tribute in the next edition so please do send me any particular memories you'd like included.

Unconscious bias and inclusion at work

This article is based on conversations at a CHRISM Theology Discussion Group meeting held on Wednesday, 24 July 2024.



1. Introduction

One of the challenges of ministry in secular employment is to work out which policies and tools that are deployed in the workplace have a particular relevance and application for one's faith. An organisation's approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is one area where the link is obvious and undeniable. As we shall see in sections 3 and 4 below, there is substantial Biblical and theological support for EDI, allied with a strong social justice case.

A widespread consensus exists that harnessing the capability of a diverse, inclusive workforce can reap meaningful rewards for

businesses and employees in terms of results, decision-making and innovation. In a 2018 paper in the Harvard Business Review, Gompers and Kovvali stated that drawing on a wide range of experiences and backgrounds in an organisation improves the potential for effectiveness, is conducive to innovation and creativity.¹ Also in 2018, Bourke highlighted that leveraging different views and perspectives reduces groupthink and generates more and better ideas.²

The last few years, however, have seen the start of a backlash against the very idea of unconscious bias and diversity training, with an increasing number of media articles lamenting these “woke courses” as a “useless” waste of money. Sceptics argue that there is little evidence that unconscious bias training works, leading some organisations – including the UK’s civil service – to cancel their schemes. In February 2024, an article in the Washington Post reported that companies including Zoom, Snap, Meta, Tesla, DoorDash, Lyft, Home Depot and Wayfair were cutting EDI teams amid wider layoff plans and that diversity and inclusion executive numbers have been reduced by 50 percent or more.³

2. Challenging misconceptions

One of the main pitfalls when thinking about this subject is to assume that diversity and inclusion are the same thing. They aren’t. Similarly, the idea that diversity will inevitably lead to inclusion is also a fallacy. Diversity reflects who’s on the team. Inclusion is about whether team members feel a sense of belonging and connection with each other that encourages their participation, fosters innovation, and leads to

¹ Gompers, Paul, and Silpa Kovvali (2018) "*The Other Diversity Dividend.*" Harvard Business Review 96, no. 4 (July–August 2018): 72–77.

² Bourke, J. (2018) "*The diversity and inclusion revolution: Eight powerful truths,*" Deloitte.

³ Telford, Taylor (2024) "*As DEI gets more divisive, companies are ditching their teams,*" Washington Post, 20/02/2024.

enhanced performance. Simply adding women to the board or promoting more people from different ethnic backgrounds might enhance diversity but it doesn't necessarily change the culture of the organisation or ensure that these underrepresented groups will feel fully included and valued.

Undoubtedly, there are risks inherent in highlighting diversity without thinking about how to create an inclusive environment. Pointing out the differences between people without channelling that energy in a positive way can lead to discrimination rather than cooperation. Also, those belonging to dominant, advantaged or privileged groups can resent the idea that those from minority backgrounds might be given a 'leg up' at work and see themselves being discriminated against because of the potential adverse effect EDI could have on their own job and promotion opportunities.

Because EDI is social rather than a science, it is true that benefits can be hard to measure. Too much can be expected from training, which, on its own, is unlikely to deliver meaningful culture change. Thinking about EDI and unconscious bias isn't a 'one-off' exercise but an ongoing journey of awareness and change.⁴ Training is about raising awareness and teaching people how to manage their biases but is of little use on its own. It's what follows that really matters.

It is also true that no change is easy, and resistance should be expected. The important thing is not to ignore or dismiss the challenges but instead use them to improve how EDI is embedded

⁴ Gino, Francesca, and Katherine Coffman. "Unconscious Bias Training That Works." *Harvard Business Review* 99, no. 5 (September–October 2021): 114–123.

within an organisation so that it becomes part of the way the organisation operates.

3. Biblical and Theological principles at stake

The starting point in terms of the biblical and theological basis for EDI includes the idea that all humans are created in the image of God, have equal dignity, and deserve respect:

- Genesis 1.26-28: All humans are created alike in the image of God and are loved by God.
- Psalm 8.4-8: All humans have equal dignity in the eyes of God.
- Matt. 6.26-34: Like the lilies of the field and birds of the air, we have individual significance and purpose to God, who notices when a single sparrow falls to the ground but values us more highly than many sparrows. So much so, that even the hairs on our heads are counted (Matt. 10:29-30).
- John 3.16: All humans are equally loved by God. The extent of God's love for the whole of the world is encapsulated by him offering up his son for our sakes.
- 1 Corinthians 12.12-14: We are the body of Christ, and each one of us is a part of it. This shows how the good of the community depends on individuals working together, contributing their gifts and talents for the benefit of all. If one part of the body suffers, the whole suffers. In a work situation, we have to work with those we might disagree with, or who have a different experience to us in terms of religious belief.

Furthermore, throughout his ministry, Jesus demonstrates a bias to the poor and marginalised:

- he associated with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9.10-17);
- he touched those society deemed untouchable such as lepers (Mk. 1.39-45);

- he restored those whom society had banished to unclean or marginal places like the man possessed by demons at Gerasa (Mk. 5.1-20);
- he healed others whose physical impairments made them outcasts, like blind Bartimaeus (Mk. 10.46-52);
- he proclaimed blessings for the poor (Lk. 6.20);
- he forgave those whose perceived conduct had caused outrage, such as the sinful woman who bathed his feet with ointment and her tears and dried them with her hair (Lk. 7.36-50), the tax collector, Zacchaeus (Lk. 19.1-10), and the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 7.53-8:11).



*Jesus eats with sinners and publicans
by Alexandre Bida (1813-1895)*

In Galatians 3:28-29 we are told our unity is not found in our intrinsic nature, but through our common redemption in Jesus Christ. This transcends all societal divisions/barriers/ differences: “There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Change and development is part of our calling. Christ's promise to always be with us through the Holy Spirit means that we enjoy the ongoing experience of God's loving, transforming presence in our lives (Rom. 12.1-2; 2 Cor. 3.17-18). It helps us to grow and become the people God intended, enabling us to deepen our knowledge and love of God, and show the same love towards others as we have received.

The overriding principle, therefore, is that God's love is universal. Expressed in practical terms, this means creating safe environments in which people can live, and work based on the truths that:

- every person reflects God's image and has intrinsic value;
- because we're all God's people, everyone should be treated with equal respect;
- individual differences should be appreciated and valued;
- people should be allowed to be, and be seen, for who and what they are.

4. The Social Justice case

There is a strong social justice case for EDI based on the belief that everyone should have a right to equal access to employment, training and development based solely on merit. Everyone should have the right to be free of any direct or indirect discrimination and harassment or bullying. This can be described as the right to be treated fairly.

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 sets minimum standards. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published a range of guidance on all aspects of the Equality Act 2010, including a Code of practice on employment. Whilst not a legally binding document, the code gives important guidance on good practice and failure to follow it may be taken into account by industrial tribunals or courts in the event of a dispute.

5. What is unconscious bias and where does it come from?

Unconscious (or implicit) bias is a term that describes the associations we hold, outside our conscious awareness and control. Unconscious bias affects everyone. It is part of how our brain works.

Unconscious bias happens when our brain automatically makes quick judgments and assessments without us thinking about them. Without the application of sense or reason, the brain defaults to personal deep-seated views and opinions that are the product of our background, previous experiences, societal stereotypes and cultural context. It is not just visible diversity characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, hair colour, height, body weight, or dress that can trigger unconscious bias but also other things like names, accents, social class, political views or religious beliefs.

Unconscious bias can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviours, especially towards other people. It can influence key decisions in the workplace and can contribute to inequality, for example in selection and recruitment, appraisals, or promotion. The good news is that unconscious biases can be managed but requires us to be intentional about noticing them and changing our behaviour.

6. How can we minimise the impact of unconscious bias?

Acknowledging that unconscious bias is real is an essential first step in seeking to manage its impact. Then, we have to be honest with ourselves in recognising and understanding what biases we may have. We might be able to identify some for ourselves but may need help to become aware of others. Discussions with trusted friends or colleagues can be helpful to explore biases. It's only by increasing our awareness of unconscious bias that we can start to mitigate against it.

The following strategies or techniques can be used to reduce the risk of unconscious bias:

- Avoid spur of the moment, snap decisions, especially on important matters. Ensure that decisions are justified by considering the evidence available and record the reasons for decisions.
- Be more vigilant in times of stress or when we're tired as our biases are likely to be more amplified.
- Making decisions together as a team can help mitigate the biases of one individual. Another defence is being open to conversations and challenges around decisions and potential biases. We can also hold one another to account by questioning views based on cultural stereotypes and monitoring each other for unconscious bias.
- In recruitment processes, by removing all identification details from candidates' resumes and applications and reviewing them "blind" as it were, decisions about whom to interview might be based more on skills and experience instead of factors that can lead to biased decisions.

We can't cure unconscious bias but with self-awareness, we can counter it.

7. Discussion points and reflections

It is reassuring that the experience of those taking part in the discussion was not as pessimistic about the future of EDI as some recent press articles might suggest, though it was noted that the subject is something of a political football in the US and the ideas expressed here would be labelled communist. Amongst those present, it was reported that one organisation had not picked EDI up again after the hiatus caused by the COVID pandemic because no marked influence on behaviour had been identified from the courses that had been run previously. Another had tried to reset its

leadership culture to be just and compassionate, but it was proving difficult and despite management rhetoric about how much things had changed, views of staff on the impact were mixed.

Other organisations, however, were continuing to push hard and were growing rather than reducing their efforts on EDI. For organisations with lots of people from diverse backgrounds, the benefits of EDI were self-evident: diversity and inclusion made them more pleasant and more productive places to work and gave them the ability to think in different and better ways. There were examples of how focusing on EDI can create a more accepting and welcoming environment and enhance people's sense of belonging and involvement. One spoke of a colleague who had transitioned a few years ago and had been very grateful for the support they had received from work colleagues through the process.

Valuing colleagues can make a real difference. An MSE shared a story about the cleaners in an office where they had worked. The cleaners did a good job but were ignored by everybody - no one spoke to them, looked at them or engaged with them. It was as if they were invisible. The MSE was not prepared to go along with this divisive and disrespectful behaviour and made a conscious decision to say "thank you" to the cleaners. They described how this simple action led to brief conversations with members of the cleaning team about families, faith, how the organisation worked and how it treated them. This was noticed by other members of staff who started doing the same and over the next 3-6 months, the culture of the office changed.

Many commented that there was now much more awareness of *neurodiversity* at work. Neurodiversity is an umbrella term used to describe alternative thinking styles such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, Tourette's syndrome and ADHD. Most people are *neurotypical*, i.e. they think and behave in a way that society

traditionally considers to be ‘normal.’⁵ There are no global statistics with comprehensive records, but it is estimated at least 1 in 7 people are neurodivergent,⁶ which means they behave, think, process, and interpret information in different ways to most other people. These conditions shouldn’t always be thought of as disabilities or disorders as, in the right context and with support, neurodivergent people can offer different perspectives and attributes. However, the reality is that for neurodivergent people, it is harder to find a job. Unemployment rates amongst the neurodiversity community is estimated to be disproportionately high at approximately 30-40 per cent.⁷ This isn’t due to lack of capability but to an institutional lack of awareness, training, and support that leaves many neurodiverse individuals ostracised from the workforce. Even for those in employment things can be challenging as working environments and practices are often designed for neurotypical people, which can make it difficult for neurodivergent employees to thrive at work.

Rather than stigmatising neurodivergent individuals, employers are gradually recognising and valuing the unique skills and talents that they can contribute to their teams and the organisational benefits they bring. For example, depending on the individual, a neurodivergent person might demonstrate a particular flair for one

⁵ Neurodiversity in the workplace. University and College Union. January 2022. https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12406/Neurodiversity-Guidance/pdf/Neurodiversity_A4_guide_January_22.pdf

⁶ ACAS working for everyone. Neurodiversity in the workplace <https://obs.acas.org.uk/ViewEvent.aspx?EventId=208707>

⁷ Neurodiverse voices: Opening Doors to Employment Achievability Westminster Commission 2018 https://www.achieveability.org.uk/files/1516612947/wac-neurodiverse-voices-opening-doors-to-employment-report_2018_interactive.pdf

(or more) of the following: problem solving, logic, innovative ways of thinking, data analysis, attention to detail, or risk taking.

Neurodiversity is part of the rich tapestry of human life and embracing these differences between people is an important aspect of EDI, to ensure that neurodivergent employees are appropriately supported and enabled to bring their best selves to work. This can only be done by getting to know the individual as the ways and extent to which a person's neurodivergence affects them can vary. Making them feel supported and part of the team might involve making simple adjustments at work, such as assistive technology (e.g. speech to text, text to speech software), adjustable lighting, providing a quiet space, clear communications in different formats (e.g. audiovisual as well as written).

Interestingly, religion and faith are common areas of difficulty. This is not just because some employers limit conversations about faith and belief to avoid potential accusations of harassment or discrimination (e.g. the NHS) but because people are uncertain about what they can and can't say without risk of upsetting someone. When it comes to matters of belief, there are still elements of fear and concern about saying the wrong thing which is a great shame because discussion with others who are different to us or who hold different views from us is one of the main ways we learn and become more understanding.

In addition to having a shared purpose, the process of building an effective team involves learning about each other: who we are, what makes us tick, what we expect of others/they expect of us, what are our likes/dislikes, etc. Fundamentally, it's about befriending people and developing the necessary shared understanding, trust, respect and interdependence between us that enables everyone to feel part of the team and to play their part in doing what needs to be done. Aspiring to the gospel, we let the friendship of Christ embrace us. In

the same way that Christ befriends us, we seek to show the same grace to others and allow Christ, through us, to befriend them too. This calls to mind the poem *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*.⁸ As the reflection of sunlight on the wings of kingfishers and dragonflies appears to make them “catch fire” or “draw flame” so revealing their unique beauty, the idea is that we, too, need to be ignited by God’s grace to reflect his glory into the world by living for love of him and our neighbours, rather than for ourselves.

The work situation, especially with a diverse team, can be a melting pot of *intersectionality*,⁹ i.e. overlapping or intersecting social and political identities and related systems of discrimination and privilege. Dealing with this can be complex and challenging. To reap the benefits of diversity and create (and maintain) an inclusive work environment built on trust and mutual respect is not a ‘one-off’ exercise, nor something that can be achieved overnight but is an ongoing process which will require understanding, persistence and patience.

⁸ Manley Hopkins, Gerard (1877).

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality>

8. Summary and conclusions

It is easy to dismiss EDI as just another management fad but that would be short-sighted in my view. EDI focuses on matters - equality, diversity and inclusion - that we should care about from a basic human perspective but even more so as MSEs. These principles are core to our ministry because they reflect gospel values of neighbourliness, treating others as we'd like to be treated ourselves, not being judgemental and seeking to know people for who they really are rather than give credence to stereotypes, prejudices or our own internal biases. Although EDI is a secular construct, it's one that we should be able to get behind.

In many ways, MSEs are well placed to challenge biases and bring about change because we already value people, recognise that different people are good at different things, are open to the idea of learning from one another and are concerned about truth. The potential benefits of EDI to organisations are well documented but we come at it from another place, from the perspective of exploring the meaning, shape and nature of Christian ministry (both lay and ordained) in the world. Understanding and embodying these principles has formational significance for all of us as we grow and develop our ministries at work and in church. It is of profound importance for ordination training. It has been suggested that MSEs have a role to play in helping to embed what organisations are trying to achieve through this initiative. Others might go further and say that it is incumbent upon MSEs to lead the way.

9. Questions for discussion:

- Has EDI had its day?
- How far should diversity go?
- What does an inclusive workplace look and feel like in your experience?

- If unconscious bias is natural, why should we seek to manage it?
- How do inclusiveness and unconscious bias relate to our Christian calling?
- What wider applications might this thinking have?

Julian Blakemore



Photo by [Vincent van Zalinge](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Meaning of Work

I listened recently to a programme on BBC Radio 4 in the series Thinking Allowed, presented by Laurie Taylor. It was broadcast on 22nd October 2024 and is available on BBC Sounds. The topic was the “Meaning of Work”, and I thought there was much here to interest MSEs. It asked the question about what is meaningful work, or rather what factors are involved in assessing work as meaningful, and it explored this through two conversations.

The first contribution was a conversation with Katie Bailey – Professor Emerita of Work and Employment at King’s College Business School, London. As a noted writer on the topic she summarised “meaningful work” as “what the person considers worthwhile”. She then explored this from the perspective of psychology i.e. attitudes to our work, and sociology i.e. the context in which work is done and what society regards as meaningful. Common to both of these approaches is the significance of narrative, how people usually “tell a story” around their experience of work. She went on to illustrate this with reference to three occupations of nurses, creative artists and lawyers. Themes of stories from each context yielded a mixture of affirmation and self-doubt. Stories from nurses expressed affirmative decisions in caregiving over against the struggle with bureaucracy. Artists, composers, musicians and writers affirmed their creativity. “Without the arts where would we be?”, they said, and enjoyed “seeing their name up in lights”, but occasionally they felt doubt whether their work was considered valuable – that it was truly “feeding the soul” or felt conflicted about taking on what they considered low grade work just to get by but was really “selling out”. Lawyers recognised the significance of their work but were also aware of pejorative attitudes in society. (Interestingly, in considering stories from lawyers, she mentioned a comparison with a manual trade such as carpenter – could the satisfaction of a legal document drawn up really compare with a craft?). As an academic she herself affirmed the good felt in helping students to progress in

their learning but owned up to a downside in negative feedback and the occasional rejection of papers submitted for publication.

Bailey provided a helpful summary of what contributed to a person's sense of meaningful work. These are:

- a) A self-aware contribution through work that brings personal value.
- b) Feedback from others about how well we do our job and how it mattered;
- c) A sense of self-efficacy in having the skills needed.

Notably (see the concluding summary), her discussion ranged across both professional and manual occupations. Questions about meaningful work applied equally to both.

The programme then moved on to a discussion with the author Jana Costas about her book “Dramas of Dignity: Cleaners in the Corporate Underworld of Berlin” published by Cambridge University Press in 2022. She is the Chair of People, Work and Management at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder), Germany. Her book is about “the army of early morning cleaners” in the cosmopolitan context of “the shiny surface” of Potsdamer Platz, a designer micro-city within Berlin's city centre.

As the title describes it, this is literally an “underworld four levels deep” but it is also meant figuratively i.e. the cleaners' own inner world of self-worth and significance. They all had to adhere to a rule of “being invisible”, of not being seen after 9 am. Nevertheless, as Costas found it, a sense of recognition in the efficacy of their work was important to the cleaners, and the author even took on cleaning to experience it with them. She identified four backgrounds amongst the cleaners. There were skilled workers with relevant vocational qualifications; there were those with other skills and who had been made redundant; there were unskilled workers; and there were those who were “dropouts” from society (she mentioned some who had

had drug addiction problems). The title of her book “Dramas of Dignity” encompassed two things, which were often in contradiction. On the one hand there is self-worth in taking pride in a job well done and in the recognition of its worth. And on the other hand there is the occasional experience of this not being recognised and where their dignity is denied. On one occasion Costas tells of how a colleague whom she knew “in her work above ground” did not recognise her (it was before 9 am.) in her cleaner’s dress. She also observed another person deliberately dropping some litter in front of a cleaner.

In this underworld, however, and as a core part of the “drama”, Costas also noted there was no sense of community as a “team”. Indeed one of the cleaners took her to task about tacitly assuming a notion of community amongst them. She came to realise that in this underworld individualism was very evident and indeed the cleaners were attuned to and lived with “hierarchies of differentiation”.

The programme drew to a close with a further brief conversation with the first interviewee, Prof. Katie Bailey. She herself was struck by the sense of pride Costas had affirmed and how meaningful work was not just a concern for elites. And she noted how “lack of recognition and not being able to find recognition” rendered a sense of meaningful work elusive.

Conclusion

If I were now to sum this up for MSE, I would suggest -

- 1) We are given in the above summary some helpful tools with which to reflect on the meaning of work and meaningful work.
- 2) We should recognise how the downside as well as the upside of work should enrich our experience, and pastorally help others to do

the same - to which has to be factored in the recognition (and non-recognition) of our work by the church.

3) The inclusive range of work, professional and manual, represented in the programme (especially in Bailey's observations) is notable. Surely this gives a reason for MSEs to include the worker-priests as part of their history and inspiration (despite the caveats of John Mantle in Britain's First Worker Priests SCM Press 2000, page 2 and chapter 5). Perhaps after all what matters is not a distinction in kinds of work but that self-supporting clergy draw where appropriate upon their experience of employment to inform, affirm and explain their ministry.

4) The importance of finding meaning at work is central to MSE.

James M.M. Francis



Finding meaning at work?

Conference of European worker priests, Herzogenrath, 25-27 October 2024

There were four of us from CHRISM attending this year, Phil Aspinall, Margaret Trivasse, Marianne Hayward and Lyn Page, as well as Hugh Williamson. We found a good balance of English, German and French speakers. In fact, it worked in favour of those of us that had no French. There was a German/English speaker who had no French combined with French/English speakers who had no German. As a consequence, everything was translated with the help of those who had multilingual skills. Everybody agreed that it had worked better than in other group meetings, as there was universal understanding and participation. It was noted that translating was a burden that should be shared as it took a lot of effort.

The bulk of the first morning was a catchup with each person saying what was happening in their situation. It was difficult to limit the time it took for each to express what they needed to say. As a result, the session took longer than allowed for in the agenda [Margaret says this is typical!]. This session was very useful to me to understand where each person was in their life, both physically and spiritually.

We then had a Bible reflection on Jesus' walking on the lake and Peter going to meet him, sinking in the process. The first thing that struck me was the English used in the translation; it was very different to our NRSV, but essentially the same. We reflected in small groups and I found this very helpful, giving me time to think about more than what was being said.

In the afternoon we had a presentation from a group in Aachen who regularly travel to the French coast to assess what is happening in the refugee camps and the boats on the beaches. They presented their findings and pointed out the distressing trends in activity and death of refugees.

In the evening there was a service with Eucharist, using as few words as possible. I found this service very moving. Afterwards, we had a buffet tea with regional food that had been contributed by everyone. My particular favourite was the herbal drink that was 50% alcohol!

The subject for Sunday morning was the concern about the political move to right in each area and how this can affect the people attending the conference. This was a stimulating conversation with several insights into the political temperature of each country. Concern was expressed about the consequences of a harder line taken with refugees and also the fear that each country will close their borders as Germany already has.

I became aware of the difference between East and West Germany: the Germans in the East still are reluctant to fully embrace democracy, so there has been a political vacuum. In this vacuum the traditional western political parties have failed to gain votes. The far right has been successful in gaining the trust of the East Germans. This is seen as a big problem for the Western parties as the far right is getting more and more influence in Western Germany without being voted in.

At the end of the meeting there was a general discussion about the meaning of 'worker priest'. The traditional (French) interpretation was that a worker priest was a priest first and then found a vocation to work alongside the working class. It was noted that this strict interpretation was becoming less true. And the traditional working priests are of an age where they will retire in the next ten years. In the Anglican church priests tend to be selected from people who already have a secular career (teachers, health professionals etc) so it is the other way around: worker first then they become priests. These observations are only a proportion of what happens; the field of worker priests is very diverse, including Little Sisters and others. The discussion was left as there wasn't any clear consensus except a

feeling that the views held were generational and as such things do, they will change.

I found my first conference fascinating and I encourage others to come in future.

Lyn Page

In preparation for the meeting, those attending were asked to submit their reflections on the two questions.

1. As members of a community of daily life and destiny, what are we experiencing currently?
2. How do we experience sharing daily life with others, in the present (political) situation?

Our CHRISM members who attended have very kindly shared their responses to these questions below.

My Communities of daily life

1. In Coventry I live in a block of flats. 12 families live there: 9 own their own flats and 3 flats are rented. In this community there are 11 pensioners, 6 employed people and in addition 3 children. Often in the rented apartments there are black families. (For example, I had Turkish neighbours, who I still often meet and we eat together).

I ask myself, are we a real community? We speak together, we support one another during illnesses, at the time of deaths, and we celebrate together. There is an important question - how can we continue to organise the administration of our building ourselves? (I am the chair of our management committee). We are becoming more aged, and there will certainly be more rented accommodation. We have to try to control the monthly maintenance payments in the face of our rising costs, and the reduction in everyone's disposable income, caused by the political and financial situation.

2. Where does one find Community? I am always looking for the places where a community exists - and I find them. In cafes, bars, pubs, social groups, workplaces. (I am speaking only of the secular world). For example, I visit a small cafe almost every Saturday for breakfast. Often the same people are there; there is a convivial atmosphere and, sometimes, conversations.

I want to encourage them, these places of community, however fragile it might be - for many people it is here that they find themselves in relation with others - relations between pensioners and workers, between old and young; a mixture of political opinions, from left to right. I have friends who voted for the new political party, Reform, and who are completely against immigration. There are others who tell me they "would not meet with a Muslim". I often find myself challenged. But.....We must stay together in community!

Phil Aspinall

Since 2021 I have worked as a psychiatrist for adults with eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. I also work with three other priests in a local parish. I share my daily life with my husband, my daughters (11 and 15 years old), my patients and my colleagues.

Most of the patients I see have a severe illness or many different problems. Often, they have been ill for a long time and don't believe their situation can change for the better. It can be hard to stay hopeful when I am with them. My team works together to support our patients and to look after each other but often some staff are off work due to illness and other posts are unfilled, so we all work very hard. However, since I have been in the team I have seen some patients get better and staff become more skilled, and I try to remember this when nothing seems to be changing for my patients.

Although the new government in Britain is likely to bring changes to the NHS my colleagues and I don't talk about this much as we think more about our team and what is happening to us now. My work as a doctor and in the parish and my family life do not leave much time or energy for other things. To share daily life with my colleagues is to share the pressures and difficulties of our work. It is also to share something of our life outside work, to be joyful together when people get married or babies are born and to mourn together when family members have problems, become ill or die.

It is a great joy too to see my daughters grow and develop into young women. They are very different from each other, but I am very proud of both of them and of how they love and support each other. Of course they also make me feel old when I do not understand all the words they use or the experience they have as young people now!

Marianne Hayward

I am a retired worker priest and spend most of my time meeting other people in local activities. I am a member of a community voice choir, lunch club, art group etc. I try to meet as many different groups as possible. I experience sharing my daily life in many different situations. North Norfolk has in the past been poorly represented by the national government policies, and most of the people of the area have fixed views of their life.

Lyn Page

I work two days each week with an organisation which works with refugees. My remarks come from that context. My colleagues and I feel two contrasting emotions. First, we rejoice because the government has changed. At last, we have a government which might take human rights seriously. They have stopped the plan to send those without status to Rwanda and they have closed a large barge where they put asylum seekers. And perhaps it will become easier to reunite families which are separated, especially those who come from Afghanistan. We hope that this government will take seriously the problems of housing, poverty and the environment.

But in August, there were violent racist riots. My friends and my colleagues were shocked and dismayed. Our office was closed for a week and our clients were advised to stay at home. Our clients were afraid. Now it seems that these riots have stopped but we are worried because the racist groups hate immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These groups are particularly against Muslims. For me, my work is with Muslims who are both colleagues and clients, but local relationships between Christians and Muslims are good and it is my friends who are being threatened. But despite what I have said, I was disappointed by the lack of action from the churches. I had hoped that there would be vigils or prayers. We must continue to defend our clients, our neighbours and our friends.

Margaret Trivasse



Farewell to Dr Nick Yates

All who knew him were very sorry to hear of the death of Dr Nick Yates on 24th July 2024 after a short illness. He worked as a General Medical Practitioner and was dearly loved husband of Margaret and beloved father to Nicky, Elisabeth, Peter and Helen and grandfather to Mary and Sam.

Nick was an active member of CHRISM. In 2016 he accompanied Phil Aspinall, Stan Frost and Susan Cooper to the International Worker Priest Conference in Drongen, Belgium, was on the committee 2017-19, and was a strong support to his wife, Margaret, during her tenure as CHRISM moderator. He is remembered very fondly as a lovely man, warm and wise and great company. Nick is sadly missed.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

What has the Committee been doing?

Key points from the latest Committee Meeting held on Saturday 23 November 2024

Eight of us met via videoconferencing. Our committee meetings start and end with prayer and at the start each member briefly shares how they are and what's happening in their life currently. Much of the meeting was focused on arrangement for the next two CHRISM weekend events: the **Reflective Weekend, 14-16 February, at Shallowford** and the **Annual Conference, set for 18-20 July 2025, at Sarum College** and with a working title of "Where do we see reconciliation and redemption in the workplace?". The AGM will form part of this event, in hybrid format.

There was further discussion about CHRISM weekends, timing and venues. We agreed to survey the membership before deciding about future arrangements. See Peter Selby's article for more on this.

Rob, our treasurer, reported that the financial position is satisfactory. Membership secretary, Sue reported current membership at 76.

A working party was formed to consider two of our CHRISM publications, the Worship Book and Theological Resource Book with a possible view to updating them

We also considered CHRISM record retention, safeguarding, GDPR compliance and the future for our archive CHRISM materials. International links are a standing item, and we were glad that five CHRISM members attended the meeting of European Worker Priests in Herzogenrath in October 2024. We discussed how we might further promote and strengthen our international links. We also agreed to check and update our links with institutions. Following the resignation of Archbishop Justin, we discussed who we might approach to be our next Patron. We meet again 1 February 2025.

Your Chance to Influence the Future of CHRISM Meetings

One of the main benefits offered by membership of CHRISM is the opportunity to meet others called to secular ministry for mutual support and encouragement. For many years CHRISM has offered two such meetings a year, usually in February and July. In addition, CHRISM also provides other opportunities for meeting with a similar calling on a wider geographical perspective through attendance meetings with the European worker priests although we do not usually organise these meetings.

The first of the CHRISM meetings each year has been billed as a reflective weekend which is aimed to do as the name implies and offer a calm space amidst busy lives to reflect on our individual spiritual lives and ministry in order to strengthen and equip us for the calling God has placed on us. The summer meeting is usually a more general conference at which we consider some issues specific to workplace-based ministry. One of the distinctive features of the summer conferences, which makes it different from other similar meetings, has been a deliberate effort to make sure that there is consideration of some of the workplaces local to the conference venue together with the issues which might influence ministry in those settings. This can be either by the participation of people from such workplaces joining the conference to share their experiences as happened in the 2023 conference in the Lake District, or by members of the conference going out themselves to visit workplaces and then reporting back to the group as occurred in Manchester in 2024.

These meetings have never been intended to be huge gatherings as one of the main characteristics of both the February reflective meeting and the July conference has been the opportunity to meet with fellow ministers in order to gain mutual support and encouragement. However, the attendance at these meetings has

become much more variable over the past few years. Hence the committee felt it would be helpful to ask you, the membership of CHRISM, what would be most helpful for you.

Although we would be grateful for any comments you may have about our meetings the committee are particular keen to hear views about the following issues:

Number of Meetings

The current pattern of two meetings per year has been established for many years. However, especially since the pandemic, many have got out of the habit of attending meetings in person. For others the cost of meetings has become a significant factor making it difficult to attend any meeting especially if there are significant travel and accommodation costs.

One possibility might be to move to a single meeting each year. This would have the benefit of focusing resources into a single event and give the opportunity for the whole CHRISM family to meet together rather than being split between two separate events. However, it would mean that anyone who is unable to attend that one event would not have the opportunity to meet with CHRISM colleagues until the next year.

Another possibility might be to retain two meetings each year but for only one of those to be a full residential weekend and for the other to become a day conference, hence saving costs of accommodation.

We would be grateful if you could consider:

- Should we continue with the current pattern of two residential meetings each year?
- If not, what alternative would you suggest?

Timing of meetings

The current pattern of meetings in February and July has become increasingly difficult for members to attend. The winter meeting is often beset with travel problems whilst the one in the summer frequently clashes with other commitments for members.

Although the current pattern of meetings is now well established this was not always the case and the committee wondered whether, if we continue with two meetings per year, these might be moved to November, where travel is often easier than in February, and May but avoiding the bank holidays.

We would be grateful if you could consider:

- Is the current February/July pattern optimal?
- If not, would November/May be preferable?
- Do you have any further suggestions?
- If we were to move to a single meeting per year what would be your preferred timing?

Format of meetings

Since the covid pandemic people have become much more comfortable with the concept of virtual attendance at meetings. In CHRISM we have a very successful theology discussion group which invariably meets online and recently the annual general meetings have been held in a hybrid manner enabling participation from as far away as Australia. Whilst virtual meetings do allow the business of the meeting to be undertaken, they do not allow for the less formal encounters with one another which are so valued by the attendees at our face-to-face meetings. Nevertheless, the committee did wonder if members would welcome the opportunity to be able to participate virtually in CHRISM meetings.

We would be grateful if you could consider:

- If an option for on-line attendance were available would that encourage you to participate in a meeting that you might not otherwise be able to attend?

Location of meetings

We tried to balance the geographical location of meetings so that it is not always the same members who have to travel the greatest distance. This generally means that of the two meetings each year one will be in the south of England and the other in the midlands or north. However, as our membership is widely dispersed, predominantly across England, there are still some members for whom travel to CHRISM meetings is still a significant burden.

The committee does have a list of potential venues for future meetings at various places across the country but are always on the lookout for additional places, if you know of local retreat houses or small conference centres which you feel might be suitable for a CHRISM meeting, please do let us know and we can look into the possibility of using them.

We would be grateful if you could consider:

- Are you content with the current way in which meetings are spread around the country?
- If not, what would you suggest as an alternative?
- Are you aware of any other possible venues which may be suitable for CHRISM meetings?

Content of meetings

As noted above, our meetings have followed the pattern of a more reflective meeting in the winter and more topic-based meeting in the summer. Is this still a pattern which suits your needs?

We would also be grateful for suggestions for themes and topics you would like to see included in CHRISM meetings.

In 2025 we plan to survey our members, seeking your thoughts on our future meetings. It would be immensely helpful to the committee if you could reply to this, even if, perhaps especially if, you have rarely if ever been to CHRISM meeting as the committee is anxious to make these as useful and accessible as we can to all our membership.

Peter Selby

You might also like:

Faith in Business Leadership Retreat

Just Grace: Forgiveness and Accountability at Work

25 - 26 April 2025 Cambridge

https://www.faithinbusiness.org/Groups/352039/Faith_in_Business.aspx

The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity
Events, courses and training

<https://licc.org.uk/events-and-training/events/>

The Christian Association of Business Executives (CABE) is a fellowship of Christians in business life who share common concerns, offer mutual support and seek to promote the application of Christian principles in the working environment.

<https://www.cabe-online.org/resources/>

Transformwork is a network of Christian workplace, professional and sectoral groups. They have some interesting resources.

<https://www.transformwork.net/Groups/207986/RESOURCES.aspx>

Dates for your diary

Book now – still places left!



Reflective Weekend, 14-16 February 2025 Shallowford, Staffordshire ST15 0NZ

<https://www.shallowfordhouse.org/about/>

The weekend is based around Jacob's journey '...and Jakov went out...' - disruption and exploration in story, faith and painting. Jan Dean is facilitating us. Jan spent almost 40 years as a poet-in-schools and 20 years as a Reader. She learned to draw as a way of resting from the wordiness of her working life and to paint as another way of trying to understand her responses to the world around her.

Do come and enjoy a refreshing and relaxing weekend retreat at Shallowford House, set within 9 acres of secluded gardens, woodland and meadows in the Staffordshire countryside. There will be time for both reflective silence and companionship, and the opportunity to explore the area, or simply have some free time to walk, talk, snooze, reflect, read, pray..... How to book:

- Complete and send the flyer to revalisoncreasey@gmail.com
- Book online via Eventbrite at [CHRISM Reflective Weekend 2025 Tickets. Fri 14 Feb 2025 at 17:00 | Eventbrite.](#)

Advance notice: Save the date!



2025 CHRISM conference and AGM, 18-20 July, 2025 will be held at Sarum College, 19 The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EE.

The working title is “Where do we see reconciliation and redemption in the workplace?”. More information soon.

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

CHRISM is on Facebook, 'Ministers at Work':

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/>

and LinkedIn, at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3756477>

CHRISM is the National Association of Christians In Secular Ministry

for **all** Christians who see their secular employment as their primary Christian ministry, and for those who support that vision. To further this aim, CHRISM publishes a quarterly Journal, releases occasional papers and organises an annual retreat. Conferences are held regularly, and worldwide links pursued.

CHRISM welcomes members, both lay and ordained, from all Christian denominations, encourages them to be active within their own faith communities and to champion ministry in and through secular employment.

If you would like confidential support as an MSE, please contact any member of the Committee. **Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or the Journal Editor.**

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