

## SPIRITUALITY IN THE PARISH

### 1. PRINCIPLES

The Church of England is in danger of losing the plot. It is not operating at the place where people perceive their spiritual needs to be. This fact is reflected in the statistics of decline.

There are three ways of responding to this crisis:

- 1) To resist change and wither away
- 2) To manage change and decline efficiently. Most Dioceses are now doing this.
- 3) To allow what is in the heart of God for his church at this time to come to birth.

The third response requires a transformation in parish spirituality.

The size of this challenge was highlighted for me when I arrived at a London conference centre. The receptionist knew only two things about me: 'Church of England' and 'Celtic spirituality'. Her opening words were 'It is in my genes to listen to intuition and dreams, but there is nothing in the Anglican tradition that does this. If I want to be in the Church of England I have to ignore this.'

Does she? Or can people like you and me bring about a transformation that will harness the latent spirituality in her and in millions like her for a great renewal of church and society?

If we are to do this, we have to face the fact that humanity is going through a massive shift in its mental framework. This vast paradigm shift means that the form church has taken in the west for centuries now needs fundamental reappraisal. Second millennium church streams have tell-tale signs of a mind-set which is becoming obsolete.

*The traces of Constantine's Church would seem to be fading, and a turning point as fundamental as the Constantinian one confronts us.*

Cardinal Franz Konig

Jesus told us it is no good trying to tear off a bit of new cloth and sew it on to the old ( Luke 5:36. ) The mental framework of the emerging society can be likened to new cloth. The old framework which the church is attached to is like old cloth. We cannot expect people who are seeking a spirituality in the new framework to find it in churches that operate in the old framework. We have to weave new cloth.

*This is an age in which the cloth is being unwoven.*

*It is therefore no good trying to patch.*

*We must rather set up the loom on which coming generations may weave new cloth according to the pattern God provides.*

Mother Mary Clare, Oxford

Even if we realise this is true, we may not know how to get out of the framework we are stuck with.

We can take heart from the example of Christians in post Roman Britain and in Ireland whose culture in some respects resembled ours. What kept the church together and enabled it to bring a fresh cradling of Christianity then was the peoples monastic movement.

We do well to look at what that Celtic movement has to offer us.

### FEATURES OF THE NEW PARADIGM THAT LEND THEMSELVES TO CELTIC SPIRITUALITY

#### 1. Relational rather than hierarchical.

Post modernism first appeared in architecture as a reaction to the dehumanising tower blocks of the 1960's. Post moderns are suspicious of the mainstream in any area of life. An article by Francis Fukuyama in The

Financial Times was headed *The Death of Hierarchy*. He argues that the flow of information is changing authoritarian forms of organisation in the workplace. They are being replaced by flat or networked organisations where shared values are the key. (x) *Weekend, Financial Times*, June 12/13 1999. Post moderns are drawn to marginalised people because they do not impose hidden agendas. Post moderns want to humanise the world; they are relationship centred.

There is a way of being church that is relational rather than regulatory. It has been called *The House that John Built*. Celtic churches (certainly those in the Iona and Northumbria tradition) felt a rapport with John. Instead of imitating the Civil Service model of the Roman Empire (the regulated top down church that has been dominant in the West), he fathered churches based on relationship more than on regulation. He modelled church as a large household of unconditional love. He fathered faith communities in the area now known as Turkey, some of whose leaders, such as Bishop Irenaeus, came to Gaul.

In practical terms this means that we give the building of relationships a higher priority than the maintaining of structures and buildings.

## **2. Spiritual rather than rational.**

Post moderns love the spiritual. They delight in mystery and paradox. They are credulous. They love to hear stories of the miraculous. They do not need the resurrection of Christ to be proved to them.

The feminisation of society means that feelings have now won proper public respect alongside rationality. Sign, symbol, and intuition are now seen to be essential to explain the whole dimension of reality. These need to be embraced, though negative aspects of feminisation such as gender confusion, crisis in masculinity and denial of motherhood also need to be addressed. Do people out there perceive the church to be male, old, and left brain dominated?

This change in what people seek has reached deep even into the young Evangelical world. According to Wheaton College professor Gary Burge: 'Say "liturgy" and my evangelical students have a reflex action akin to an invitation to do a quiz; say "mysticism" and they are drawn, fascinated, eager to see what I mean...'  
*Christianity Today* October 6 1997

St Patrick recounts mystical experiences, which he sees as a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, and the Celtic saints combine the practical and the mystical in a compelling way.

## **3. Explorative rather than possessive**

Post moderns dislike boundaries. To travel is more important than to arrive. To explore is OK, to package or market what you have found is not. Post moderns distrust progress, are allergic to advertising, refuse to judge. Post moderns don't want someone who knows it all. They want soul friends.

We should frequently recall that the leader of our church is Jesus Christ, who called himself 'The Way' (John 14:6). In *The Acts of the Apostles* people nicknamed church members 'The Way' (e.g. Acts 9:1,2). The church, reflecting its members, gave the impression of being on a journey, on a voyage of discovery with God. Over the centuries the church has accumulated buildings, structures, and mind-sets which focus on maintaining what it has, rather than on moving on with God.

If our leader is 'The Way' the church must be more like a tent than a terminus.

Brother Roger, prior of the French community church at Taize, refused the gift of a house because, he said, 'it makes everything so complicated'. His church is committed to 'the pilgrimage of trust on earth.' Even their worship building can expand or contract according to changing numbers.

In order to be an exploring person and church we build into our personal and church routines times of silence, listening, and responding.

#### 4. Inclusive rather than exclusive

Post moderns like to draw out the possibilities that lie within everyone rather than to judge or pigeonhole them. The Church of England has talked much about its role as a 'Comprehensive' church. Unfortunately many people thought this meant that the church did not stand for anything, and they despised it.

Yet within this concept is a God-given seed, deep in the soul of the nation, that now needs to be planted out in the sunlit top soil. This seed is Hospitality. Hospitality can bind all sections of the church in a common vision. It means welcoming all people as they are, until they feel able to bring the needs they feel to the church and to its God. It means not putting upon them alien requirements, but providing welcoming space and affirming presence in which they may journey.

Anglicans have a reputation for cultural aloofness and elitism; for despising ways which lack aesthetic excellence whether it be happy clappy worship or ethnic bands. We in turn can be perceived as introverted, lukewarm, incomprehensible and inhospitable. To encourage the life of God in those of different cultures to ourselves, to release them and give the opportunity -that is hospitality. To make space for groups so that they find and embrace the true and eternal love - that is what it means to be a comprehensive church.

Early community churches in Britain and Ireland outgrew houses, but they still shared meals together and with strangers. They built refectories. One or several community members were set aside for the work of hospitality. Columba's community church at Derry fed 1,000 hungry people daily. Some Sikh temples do this in modern Britain, but is there any church that does it? Even when David's monks in Wales ate only bread themselves, they cooked appetising meals for the elderly and frail!

They built friendly relations with those who lived around, used popular cultural idioms, and hosted the 'Karaoke's' of those days. Their best leaders took the trouble to share their faith with forgotten and foreign groups. They could do this because they were earthed in a community which freed them for this work, and which could welcome promising converts for training.

In the 2nd millennium most churches were praying places but not eating places. In the 21st century church buildings that are not used for such activities as eating are ignored or vandalised. Although in a Welfare State there is not always a physical need for churches to be eating places, there may be a social need. Sir Terence Conran, the restaurateur, predicts the emergence of the cafe society: 'Cafes will increasingly serve as outside offices and public spaces in which to do business.'

A young man came back from a pilgrimage to Medugorge and said it was like a warm womb. Then he paid a compliment to his local church: 'this, too, is like a womb for me'.

#### 5. Culture friendly rather than anachronistic

It has been said that pre-moderns asked 'Is it true?'; moderns asked 'Does it work?' and post moderns ask 'Does it feel good?'. The feel-good factor, whether we approve of it or not, is what determines most people's habits today.

Religion is now a la carte. Most people select the ingredients with which they feel most comfortable. Churches that do not provide for this become obsolete.

In his modestly entitled book 'How the Irish saved civilisation' Thomas Cahill describes how St Patrick swam into the hearts and imaginations of people. They felt good about him. He started where they were. He used their language.

This is in fact only doing on a small scale what Jesus did on the grand scale in his incarnation. It is doing what St Paul did: 'When with the gentiles I live as a gentile.'

So to live like this in the parish we list the protocols and traditions we have inherited and we strike out those that make outsiders feel alien.

It is the spirituality of the shoes. We put ourselves in the shoes of the other.

## 6. Holistic rather than fragmented

The Enlightenment years split off the mind from the body, science from faith, money from religion, the sacred from the secular, and Christians from the universal church. Post moderns are done with this. They know that the earth is a connected biosphere, that humans are bound up with the web of life. Generation X is fed up with fragmented Christianity. Christians no longer want to be defined by a protest movement four hundred years ago (The Reformation).

Yet young as well as old clergy think of themselves as 'evangelicals' 'Reform', 'Catholics', 'Forward in Faith', 'liberals', 'post evangelicals' or 'charismatics' first, as Anglican second, and as part of the one church third. It is the disease that Paul warned against: 'When some of you say "I belong to Paul's group" and others say "I belong to Apollos' group" don't you realise you are behaving like non-Christians?' (1 Corinthians 3:4). I meet ex Anglicans who have become Orthodox and they say that is one reason why they have converted. They realise, and so must thoughtful Anglicans realise, that the church, if it is to be true and deeply Christian must have the homogeneity of the Body of Christ, and styles, symbols, are secondary. As people go deeper and to the Centre, their churchmanship style is also deepened, changed and becomes homogeneous.

## 7. Earth- rather than Ego-centred

Ecological awareness is on the increase. Respected experts believe that the earth in its present form will not survive unless the fast expanding human race radically changes longstanding selfish habits. People who seek the good of the earth seek something that God desires, yet few of these perceive churches to be allies. Many of these people recognise that to befriend the earth requires spirituality, yet few of them find creation- friendly spirituality in the churches. Many people seek a spirituality which is natural, and they feel violated if the church puts on unnatural airs, or neglects the earth.

Spiritual thirst draws many towards earth-based spiritualities. Because Celtic Christianity grew in the ferment of a nature religion it retained a soul-deep appreciation of the earth, whereas other expressions of Christianity dismissed the material world as fallen and therefore as worthless.

To be creation friendly does not mean that we don't take sin or Jesus seriously. The Bible teaches us to be creation friendly. This creation friendly theology continues to this day in the Eastern Church but in western churches an earth-denying theology took over. Spirit was divorced from matter.

However, Celtic churches in the west did not lose a creation friendly understanding. 'Augustine taught that creation was an act of God's power, Celtic Christians saw it as an act of God's love.'

*Lesslie Newbiggin*

Columbanus, echoing St Paul in Romans 1:20, taught church members to live with two books in their hands: the Scriptures and Creation.

## CONCLUSION

These seven changes that the new paradigm enjoins requires of us a fundamental reappraisal of attitudes and practices. It is nothing less than a re-formation.

It will not come about unless we embrace a deep metanoia, a transforming repentance. Those who are able to engage in this will be those who are willing to go into the desert. The new paradigm calls us to adopt desert spirituality, to create regular spaces for silence, examination, and transparent accountability to an anam chara.

# SPIRITUALITY IN THE PARISH

## 2. PRACTICE

The dispersed Community of Aidan and Hilda, which I serve, was launched in 1994 at a symposium for 'Roots for Renewal'. Any interested person was invited to explore, with a soul friend, a way, or rule, of life which has ten points. All sorts of people who have read the Way of Life in my book *Exploring Celtic Spirituality* have written to say, in effect, 'This is where I belong. Why hasn't the church told me of this?' Our Community Council became so concerned at the number of people who choose a personal spirituality along these lines but who feel that their parishes are inimical to it, that we now seek to help parishes, and not just individuals, to embrace this way.

I shall now highlight the ten points in this Way and give a practical example of how they can be applied in parish life.

### 1. DISCIPLESHIP

A trades unionist once said to me 'The trouble with you clergy is that you think you can take your L plates down once you have left college.' Jesus calls us his disciples, and the word disciple means a learner. We are learners for life.

Bede records:

Aidan taught the clergy many lessons about the conduct of their lives but above all he left them a most salutary example... All who accompanied him had to engage in some form of study... This was the daily task of Aidan and all who were with him.' Bede, Ecclesiastical History 3:5

Western people are obsessed with the craze to accumulate more information as a tool of the Ego, or to acquire academic certificates that give them status. Study that is divorced from the living of a whole life becomes a curse, not a blessing.

This Rule offers an alternative approach to study. Following the great teachers of the early church we believe reality is grounded in God. To be made in God's likeness means that we can see no one and nothing as it truly is without seeing as God sees. We can ultimately only know the truth by living it.

What should we study? Daily Bible reading, but also daily reflection on what we have learned from the interactions of the day. Creation, and also the wisdom of wise people. The lives of saints, but also that seed-bed of holiness, desert spirituality.

#### EXAMPLE

The Emmaus Course is an attempt to restore a long term catechumenate to the church. Some churches now build in times of reflection on the lessons learned through the week, either in household or church gatherings.

### 2. JOURNEY

The primary model for the Old Testament 'church' was the People-on-the-Move with God. They allowed God to show them through creation when to move and when to stay put. Exodus 13:20-22. Later, when they were settled, they recalled God's way of leading them when they faced a new challenge. Deuteronomy 1:29-33.

Celtic churches were stable but they were not stuck in an outdated mould. They cherished what they had received but that made them all the more responsive to the Spirit who ever leads God's people on.

They built prayer and listening to God into their routines. They released members to travel as pilgrims for the love of God. When numbers grew they moved into small, easy-to dismantle buildings. They gave away rather than accumulate possessions. They told stories and meditated on great voyagers of faith such as Brendan the Navigator. They went on pilgrimages in order to act out God's call to journey. They provided soul friends for individuals who wanted to journey with God.

## EXAMPLES

Cityside Church, Auckland, New Zealand asked each member to return a form with their answers to these questions: 1. One thing you have found helpful 2. One thing you have found unhelpful 3) One thing you'd like to see. The responses were photocopied and put on the church web site for all to see.

Studley church in Coventry Diocese has introduced listening and sharing services once a month.

In my former parish we from time to time held prayer vigils, on a rota basis, which ended with a larger gathering. Vigillars wrote down on acetates things they felt God was saying and these were gathered together, and then expressed in a picture, which became a visual reminder of what God was saying to us at that time.

### 3. RHYTHM OF PRAYER, WORK AND REST.

The Bible sets the entire story of God's saving work within a universe of rhythm. It tells us how God teaches a people ways to reflect that rhythm: through one day in seven and one year in seven rest; the rhythm of prayer that reflects, the sun rising, the sun at its midday height, and the sun setting. It reveals how the Saviour arranged for his most significant actions to coincide with the rhythm of the religious seasons.

A pastor of a London church said it is vital his church addresses rhythm, for 'we either resonate with everything and find discord or we resonate with the deepest things of God and find rhythm'. The excuse of local churches was that everybody was too busy. Yet, now there is a mosque in that area. Moslems close their shops in the lunch hour, and arrange their programme around the call to midday prayer. The mosque has restored an element of rhythm to religion in that area, yet how many Christians realise that this Muslim custom was borrowed from the Arab Christians and was lost by the western Christians?

Yet once churches again become like monasteries it is possible to create a sense of daily rhythm which touches and inspires a wider number, even amongst the most mobile population, and which connects them with the ebb and flow of deeper realities.

In emerging churches the corporate worship follows the rhythm of the natural seasons and of the church year, and observes seasons of fasting or spiritual warfare.

## EXAMPLE

Some churches which are renewing daily corporate prayer adopt a theme for each day, such as the following:

Mondays: Creation and the world of work. Tuesdays: Incarnation, reconciliation, justice and peace.  
Wednesdays: Healing and education Thursdays: Unity, Community, sacrament and creative arts.  
Fridays: The Cross and the world's broken people (fast day). Saturdays: Sports and saints  
Sundays: Resurrection and renewal of church and society

Some churches also have a common of household meal on Thursday or Friday.

Some ways churches are bringing together work and prayer by sponsoring work projects.

### 4. SPIRITUAL INITIATIVE

We encourage everyone to 'overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21). St. Cuthbert and others 'stormed the gates of heaven'; we also need to engage in intercession. This should be understood as prayer through visualisation, verbalisation and action.

St Paul encourages us to pray in all ways, and parishes can build up a kind of patchwork of prayer in many forms. In my former parish the twice daily meditative prayer in the Worship Centre at 9:15am and 7:00pm was a mainstay. On Wednesdays we replaced the meditative prayer with an old style church prayer meeting. Another small group decided to meet at 7:00am on Fridays to pray for revival. A Wednesday morning prayer group sought to discern what needs in the church and the neighbourhood God wanted to address, and they would sometimes prayer walk in the street they had been directed to. A telephone prayer chain was formed that was activated when there was an emergency prayer need. Each church

## EXAMPLE

Churches, like cities and individuals, either go forward or they go backward. We cannot stay as we are, because we are living organisms. After some years waves of teenage vandalism threatened to turn the 'dream village' of Bowthorpe into a nightmare. Yuppies, including church members, moved out. Many who stayed had too low an image of themselves and Bowthorpe to halt a downward spiral. In such a situation, how should a church carry out Jesus' injunction to overcome evil with good? We sought a God given strategy, and to affirm and work with good people who wanted to turn the situation round. Head teachers, police, youth workers, voluntary organisations, health and church workers met together. The approach was three-pronged. We planned how to raise residents' self image, and we brought about a change of tack in the local press.

## 5. LIFESTYLE

A simple life-style means setting everything in the beauty of creation. Our belongings, activities and relationships are ordered in a way that liberates the spirit; we cut out those things that overload or clutter the spirit.

In a world of increasing complexity we yearn for simplicity, but institutions sink under mountains of paper and we succumb to the tyranny of a myriad competing demands.

Being simple is not the same as being simplistic. Simplicity is beautiful, pure. Jesus taught that those who have this quality, this singleness of heart, are truly blest, for they are the ones who will see God (Matthew 5:8). Living simply is not easy. We will not achieve simplicity overnight. We have to work at it every day, in the different aspects of our lives.

Where do we begin in order to establish it? We have to start within ourselves, for if our inner voice is chaotic, our attempts to establish outward simplicity will be reduced to a series of rear guard actions. This means that we say 'no' to things that are extra to or contrary to God's will. It also means that we find the appropriate time and place and expression for the things we are meant to do.

Simplicity in what we buy requires us to confront the national addiction to shopping. Charles Kettering of General Motors said 'The key to economic prosperity is the organised creation of dissatisfaction.' Those who find satisfaction in the adventure of being guided by God do not need to be shopaholics. The less we buy, the simpler our life will be.

Simplicity in the way we arrange our homes and work place not only leads to tidy homes, it makes them safe places. Everything has its place. Put it in it's place or dispose of it. Some of us follow the advice in St. Columba's Rule: if someone gives you something, give something away.

Simplicity in the way we handle our routine business reduces stress and creates space. If you have a bank account, pay regular bills by standing order. Pay other bills straight away; this saves paper, time and cost at both ends. Deal with every item at the first opportunity. Try to handle any piece of paper only once. Bin all you can.

Debt hinders us from simplifying our bills. It is a curse. One follower of this Rule has stopped using credit cards because it clouds her inner eye. I use them, because it saves me writing cheques.

Simplicity in our speaking and writing grows as we express what is deepest in our hearts in plain words.

Simplicity in our relationships is the fruit of transparency. Have no hidden agendas. Never behave towards one person in a way which requires you to hide from another. Say no to invitations unless you have peace to say yes.

The only way for some people to find simplicity is through solitude. Simone Weil said 'Distraction is the root of sin... Concentration is the essence of prayer'. 'Distraction' is the opposite of simplicity, it is trying to do or think about more than one thing at once. Followers of this Rule will combat the tyranny of the telephone. It is not right to be on call day and night: it is possible to divert, record or silence phone calls.

We need to encourage the churches to live by this rule of simplicity. Institutions accumulate ways of doing things. These may have had good reason the first time round, but now they are done that way only because

'it has always been like that'. In order to eliminate cumbersome, unnecessary ways we need to question them. This also applies when we are planning new projects.

#### EXAMPLE

Certain churches adopt a set of values, or make a covenant, or, as with Christ Church Epsom, invite those members who will follow a Pattern of Living which embraces a simple lifestyle, and encourages every home to have a regular meal; together when all are present to one another and to God, and to have a prayer corner.

### 6. CHERISHING CREATION

A new resident knocked on my door. 'I stopped going to churches because they do not honour the earth' Judith explained. 'I tried New Age and American Indian communities who do honour the earth, but I left them because they do not honour Christ. I am looking for a church that honours both Christ and the earth'. 'Come and help us be a church like that' I suggested. The church cared for its gardens; now Judith made the interior of the church ruin looked cared for. We were not permitted to plant trees in that space. However the church supported the city council's project to plant an entire copse of trees with local volunteer labour. Church members turned out in force.

I explained that the church had done a Green Audit (x), had closed its account with a bank which exploited the Third World, and that we had lived for a day as if in a Third World village, fetching water from our nearest river. Although we were a church without a churchyard, we created a garden of remembrance where ashes are scattered.

Shortly afterwards we held our first annual Blessing of the Earth service. We grieved for the violence done to God's earth, and we offered praise for the elements of earth, air and water. 'How like a mother is the soil the Lord has made; it contains us and feeds us, it warms us and upholds us' we prayed. 'Lord bless our land and your children who live by it.' Afterwards a new member, Gary, who had gained sensitivity through suffering, said: 'Something has changed. Now the earth of Bowthorpe can breathe freely again after all these years.'

#### EXAMPLES

Emerging churches use energy saving, non polluting materials, recycled products, buy local, fair trade or organic foodstuffs, donate to ecology projects, improve the ecology of their area, build up eco consciousness in local schools, support local ecology groups or the Agenda 21 Process initiated by the Rio Earth Summit of 1994. Get out into the outdoors, cut out over consumption, and practise forgiveness. They make the best of any curtilage, churchyard or garden area: for wild flowers, growth of fruits or vegetables. They create connections with wild places, reclaim and guard sacred spaces.

### 7. FROM FRAGMENTATION TO WHOLENESS

The Bible has a holistic world view. The second millennium church lost this. The emerging church will recover it or disintegrate.

In Christ, the head of the church, all things hold together, Colossians :17-18. Outside of Christ all things fall apart. Primal, ecological and New Age spiritualities recognise that we are all connected to the web of life, but often churches do not.

Millennium 2 churches became disconnected from the grass roots patterns of the people, from the communal memory and from the earth itself. A minister told me 'I have no problem of getting more people to come to church. We have good numbers attend our Alpha courses, and social events. What we lack is something deeper, that therefore gives us all a sense of belonging, and which enables us to connect at every level.'

We need to reconnect science with God, money with morality, the secular with the sacred, sexuality with the spirit, individual choice with justice, doctrine with experience. As churches do this, they will be honed to take on bigger tasks: to re-ensoul the world. Emerging churches will provide prayers and presences to help people mark a birth or anniversary, a new home, job or relationship, to bless or draw forth potential in places, schools, research, industry, commerce or leisure.

We seek to offer our little plans in relation to the bigger whole, of what God is doing in the world at large.

#### EXAMPLE

Marylebone Church is part of a larger healing centre. We must understand God's plan in relation to the whole of our society.

### 8. OPENNESS TO THE SPIRIT

Learning to listen is a skill that has almost been lost, and which takes many years to acquire. We seek to cultivate an interior silence that recognises and sets aside discordant voices, to respond to unexpected or disturbing promptings of God, to widen our horizons, to develop "the eye of the eagle" and see and hear God through his creation.

Yet if we are open to any influence we will fall for anything, and end up on the scrap heap. Scripture warns us against being blown by every wind of deceitful people (Ephesians 4:14). No wonder so many people choose to be closed rather than become the plaything of others.

Prophecy is receiving living words or visions from God to pass on. Moses once said 'Would that all God's people would prophesy'. The prophetic spirit is now on us. It was poured out on Christians at Pentecost.

A vision needs to be sufficiently clear and concrete to act as a beacon or guiding motif for those we seek to move with. President John F Kennedy held out on a vision of service overseas and launched the Peace Corps.

When a shared vision which people genuinely want to achieve is lacking, forces in support of the status quo within the church or group may become overwhelming. Minor disagreements, personal shortcomings and in growing tendencies begin to dominate. The group becomes distracted and unfocused.

To discover and move towards more widely stated visions we need to ask What is God's Spirit reaching out to create in our rapidly changing world? and How can we best cooperate with this divine impulse so that what God wants can come to birth?

In order for us to ask these questions we may have to pull back from activities and commitments that fill life to the brim and to resist the compulsion to be busy, so that there is space to discern the nudges of the Spirit.

#### EXAMPLE

In my former parish we tried to be open to the Spirit in a number of ways. I committed myself to routinely listen in quiet to the whispers of the Holy Spirit and to write these down in order to catch hold of them. We aimed not to compile church agendas before we had prayed, and we included times of silent listening in our meetings and worship. On fifth Sundays we shared in Quaker meetings, when nothing was spoken unless it was thought to be a prompting of God. Occasionally a member would offer a prophetic word which the leadership weighed and conveyed to the church. We made a conscious effort to fit our decisions and structures into the flow of God's will, not vice versa; we were willing to be provisional, or to be proved wrong.

### 9. UNITY

During the second millennium three great strands of Christianity became separated, as Bishop Leslie Newbiggin once pointed out. There was the catholic strand of community around the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; the Protestant strand of personal conversion around the Bible; and the Orthodox (and in a sense the Pentecostal) strand of worship around an experience of the Holy Spirit. We seek to weave these three strands together again.

The Russian Metropolitan in Paris between the wars, Eulogy, wrote that the saints of east and west "have in their lives accomplished the union of the churches. Are the not citizens of the same holy and universal church? At the level of their spiritual life they have gone beyond the walls which divide us, but which... do not reach up to heaven."

Do we only do God's work so long as it benefits us, or do we see ourselves, in our hearts, as building the Body of Christ of which we are only a tiny part?

Team building requires us to involve as many people as possible within an organisation in a consultation process. Trust is only built through a dialogue honest enough to reveal our prejudices and caring enough to make us want to overcome them. The process of self discovery and change lies at the heart of our work. The more we do this, the more we will build a comradeship across our differences. The less we do it, the more we will fracture into isolated initiatives.

#### EXAMPLE

In my former parish of Bowthorpe which was sponsored by six denominations, we began to weave these three strands together. We also tried to develop unity in our internal way of working together. For example, we had four rules for dealing with disagreements:

Do not criticise an individual in front of others.

Forgive others, even if you disagree with them.

Deal with a fault in someone by talking it through face to face, always seeking the spiritual progress of the other person. Then they, not feeling judged, can behave freely, because they know that even if they make a mistake they will not be belittled. If this fails and others are being harmed, only then bring it to the Church leaders in confidence.

We also emulated the Bishop of Norwich who told how, as a parish priest, he read extracts from the Rule of Taizé Community in France to his Church Council: 'Express in a few words what you feel conforms most closely to God's plan, without imagining that you can impose it.'

#### 10. MISSION

There is evidence that the 5th - 7th century Celtic Mission was unusually effective in winning Irish, British and English pagan populations to God, and in transforming society.

In the Roman way of mission, which remained dominant through the second millennium, the powerful often compelled the powerless to switch their allegiance to Christ without winning their hearts. In Ireland and in much of Britain the church captivated the hearts of the people without either the use of force of standardised packaging.

One ruling family after another embraced the Faith and gave prime estates to be used as a monastic hub of tribal life. These early monasteries had no barriers, apart from a ditch from practical reasons. There was constant movement in and out by children, women, labourers. There were no imposing buildings.

Ian Bradley has described what went on at these multi resource centres. It was a similar story in Britain. Kentigern (also known as Mungo), exiled from the north, founded a monastery at Llanelwy. They established a school, farms, a hospitality centre; people of all types and ages were part of this church. They developed 'troops and choirs'. These offered a ceaseless round of praise, and constantly sent out faith sharing teams. Llanelwy became a power house of prayer whose members were thought of as God's wrestlers. Kentigern was able to carry through heroic missionary and pastoral tours because he had the rhythm of advance and retreat safeguarded by a monastic church.

The two spear heads were friendship and incarnation. Bishop John Finney's research into how people today find faith reveals that the vast majority have come to faith through friendship.

They planted the presence of Christ in the places that were the heart of the people's life. A new university had its first intake of students before the paths were laid. So its planters observed the tracks students made across flower beds and then laid the paths along those tracks. That is what we now have to do.

END

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