

# **Church Planting:**

## **2. Some Experiences and Challenges**

by

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## THE COVER PICTURE

is by Tiffany Ponsonby (team member at Nailsea plant—see p.6)

## PREFACE (Prologue)

'Do you not say, "Four months more and then the harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour'. (John 4.35-38) ... 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'. (Matt. 9.37-8)

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## INTRODUCTION: Building on Booklet No.1

My first booklet<sup>1</sup> was born out of our own vision and commitment to church planting. In it I set out to establish that church planting was fully biblical and historical as well as relevant to today's British context of evangelism and mission. I also reviewed a wide range of models of church planting, relating them specifically to different Anglican parish situations. To help in the understanding of what is involved, I presented various analyses and analogies aimed at categorizing the broad range of different types of planting strategy. I also began to try to answer some of the challenging questions directed at those involved in church planting, particularly as regards our theology of the church.

In this second booklet I hope to develop more depth by presenting some selected case histories.<sup>2</sup> In choosing from among the many recent church planting initiatives I have sought to give examples of the main categories of church planting within the Church of England. First, I have chosen St Luke's, Bolton where the plants were within the parish and initiated with small groups. Planting within the parish is the easiest form in the Church of England and therefore the most common.<sup>3</sup> Some have planted daughter churches and others satellite congregations, which stay part of the one parish church. St Luke's opted for the latter but their story demonstrates many principles applicable to either approach. My second case history is the story of one of the plants out of Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) in London. I have chosen their second plant which was into St. Mark's, Battersea, and was a case of a large group transplant which also involved crossing parish, deanery and diocesan boundaries. It was nonetheless what I have called a progression plant, which is one that builds on existing members in the area where the new congregation is established.

Our own story is obviously the one which we can tell from the inside. This illustrates the small 'seed team' or mobile missionary team which can pioneer into a completely new area—in our case moving from South-East to North-West England. Lastly, I felt the picture would not be complete without presenting an example of where exciting plans for planting have been allowed to be frustrated by institutional and legal problems.

In my first booklet<sup>4</sup>, I said that I felt that the church planting movement in fact presents as many challenging questions to the church institution as have been levelled in its direction. With each of the case histories told here I not only draw out church planting principles but I also lead on to some of these questions and challenges which I believe urgently need to be faced. I then conclude the booklet with some of my thoughts on the way ahead for increased church planting mission and evangelism within the Church of England.

<sup>1</sup> Bob Hopkins, *Church Planting: 1. Models for mission in the Church of England* (Grove Evangelism Series No.4, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Many of the lessons and challenges from these stories build directly on the first booklet. Frequently reference is made to related material but ideally the two booklets should be read in conjunction with one another.

<sup>3</sup> Similar principles apply to the Church in Wales where at least one plant has occurred.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* section 6, p.25.

## 1. SATELLITE CONGREGATIONS AND PARISH RESTRUCTURING

As I have indicated, there are now very many cases of planting within the parish boundary, either daughter churches or satellite congregations. One of the first parishes to pioneer the satellite congregation model was Chester-le-Street in Co. Durham. There the succession of plantings led to seven congregations within one parish. The story I have chosen again involves more than one satellite being planted. This is becoming quite common now and itself indicates the positive potential of the strategy, since the churches' experience of it encourages them to repeat it. This case is also interesting in that the two satellites are somewhat different and so bring out additional principles.

### 1. The Story of St. Luke's, Bolton

The parish takes the form of an extended strip along either side of a main road out of town some 1½ miles from the centre. It is an urban industrial area with many factories and old mills together with terraced housing in cobbled streets and some more recent council development. It is an Urban Priority Area (U.P.A.) in an Urban Aid Area and the parish population is small. Of the 4500 inhabitants 25% are Asian of largely Hindu background. Children represent some 30% of the population and there is one school. The parish church is a lovely modern building with excellent facilities. It was built in 1978 to seat 150, after the old church was burnt down. Then under the leadership of the new vicar, the Rev. Stewart Reid, there was rapid growth in numbers. Despite an extension adding 50 more seats in 1980 and another doubling capacity to 300 in 1983, by 1986 the church was again full. Plans were considered to extend the building yet again and add a further 100 seats. However, a review of attendance showed that in spite of a lot of local outreach, most came from middle class areas outside the parish (in 1987 there were only 27% from within the parish). It was felt that an extra 100 spaces could fairly readily be filled up—but largely by drawing in more from outside. As the vicar, staff and PCC looked for the right strategy for continued growth they decided on a plan of church planting aimed at better reaching the people in the parish. These plants were not to be daughter churches but satellite congregations meeting only on Sunday mornings. The philosophy has been that St. Luke's will always be one church—but worshipping in a number of different places. Sunday evenings would continue to be a focus of unity with a combined service. Also home groups, of which there are currently ten, would network across the congregations. Some satellite members even pop in for a second cup of coffee to the parish church on Sunday morning!

**Step by Step:** In September 1986 the first satellite was started in the Mortfield Bowling Club, just 300 yards away from the parish church down a side street. The initial nucleus of 30 people quickly rose to more than double, due to the prayer and the enthusiasm with which local people were visited and friends invited to this 'new thing'. A host of outreach events were generated covering both specific areas and the 300 plus membership of the bowling club. There were treasure hunts, coffee mornings, games evenings (a bowls match against the club!), and some from

the new congregation started attending the mid-week social nights at the club. The very well attended carol services have brought in some 50-60 from the club and the club staff now advise when members are in hospital. Although numbers have fallen more recently as the novelty has worn off, there are still some 70 on a good Sunday morning, over half of whom are local parish residents. Another spin-off has been that some club members are starting to attend the new over-60's group at the parish church.

Following the success of this first plant, a second satellite was started in the Red Cross centre on Grafton Street just 500 yards down the main road from the parish church. From its beginning in September 1987 the vision was to see this congregation reaching out to the Asian community. Initially there was one Asian man with one Anglo-Asian girl and later three further Asian men have joined. Growth in this sort of mission is slow and a starting group of 20 members on a Sunday morning has reached 30 in the first 18 months. However a 'Good News Club' for children has attracted many from Asian and one-parent families and events are planned to reach the parents. In the case of both satellites there has been a sense of feeling their way and they are aware that lots of mistakes have been made.

**The Teams:** In the case of the first satellite the team was formed after challenging PCC members and approaching individuals as a result of staff prayer. In fact most of the initial 30 (plus a few children) volunteered. There were 5 from the PCC who formed the leadership team under the supervision of Patricia Wick the deacon. Each of these leaders initially took responsibility for a different area of the congregation's life—i.e., pastoral co-ordination, evangelism, liturgical worship, practicalities (microphones, sidesmen, bibles.). However, as things have developed these roles have changed as folk have been discovering where their giftings lie. There is no strong overall leader in the team. The whole exercise has been a learning experience for the congregation.

The team for the second plant was formed in a similar way, although more encouragement was needed from the staff. The team was a bit smaller with 19 volunteering, only 16 of whom persevered, although one was an 80-year-old who had worshipped at St. Luke's all her life. In fact both teams were formed on a basis of a minimum one year commitment and a few went back to the mother congregation after this time. As it happened there were no PCC members in the Grafton team, although later two members of the congregation have been elected on. The team members were newer to St. Luke's and some came from a high church tradition.

**Bereavement Blues back at Base:** Despite the fact that these plants are not independent daughter churches, there was still a considerable experience of bereavement back at the 'mother' congregation. Some of the most gifted people were given away in the 'plant teams' and rotas had to be re-arranged to fill the leadership gaps. A lot of time has been needed to overcome initial reactions and the sense of lost friends. However, numbers have recovered each time at the parish church and they are getting back to being full again after the second 'giving away'. Although some new members are still from contacts outside the parish, the parent congregation has itself set up two new programmes to focus more on its immediate neighbourhood. A new play-group is building up nicely and so is an over-60's group.

**Worship Patterns:** St Luke's does not have a strong emphasis on eucharistic worship. Communion is celebrated twice a month at the parish church. Their preferred strategy for the satellites would be to take bread and wine from the parish celebration for lay distribution but this is not sanctioned by the diocesan bishop. The vicar therefore celebrates less frequently—at about 6 weeks to 2 monthly intervals. The church is neither conservative nor charismatic in its worship. They aim for a balance between reasonable structure and relatively free forms of worship within it. The combined Sunday evening service is the most informal though the settings of the two satellites make for a more relaxed atmosphere in the mornings. To assist the lay leadership at the satellites, all the three morning congregations have their liturgy on home-produced service cards.

**Analysis:** Based on the analysis in my first booklet (section 4, p14-22) both these plants are of the vegetative type, within a parish (P-types). The means of planting was a large team, which I would now rather class as a small group (see section 5, p23). In the case of Mortfield this was a progression plant, building on existing church members in that area of the parish. In contrast the Grafton satellite was more a pioneer plant with few if any existing members in that part of the parish, many of the residents being of different ethnic background.

## 2. Some Lessons and Principles Emerging:

(a) St. Luke's feel that the support of their bishop and continual dialogue with the diocese has been crucial in the development of their satellites. At no stage has this been a 'hole in the corner' affair. Rather, at every stage there has been diocesan support and the Bishop of Bolton himself attended the first harvest festival at the Bowling Club and the first communion service at the Grafton satellite in the Red Cross Centre. When first discussing the challenge of the full parish church, he even suggested the possibility of them taking over a neighbouring parish church that was about to be closed. This possibility may still be open once they complete their strategies for growing ministry *into* the parish.

(b) The two plants have taught them a lot about the advantages and drawbacks of secular buildings such as clubs and centres. Although a non-ecclesiastical venue definitely helps with Asian outreach, to their surprise they find that many northerners when seeking God prefer a building that they can associate with God.<sup>1</sup> This is leading to a strategy of bringing in new people at the parish church and then training them and sending them out to the satellites to make room for others at the centre. The club with its bar and restaurant tables has some practical disadvantages, which are not experienced at the Red Cross Centre. The forced exit by 12 noon for bar opening is also limiting. On the one hand rented premises have the advantage of low cost and low commitment during the early experimental phase of these plantings. However, as time goes on, there is a corresponding disadvantage of the instability of possible loss of facilities at very short notice. As the Asian ministry grows at the Grafton plant they are considering services other than on a Sunday. Another observation has been that for factory workers and the unemployed, Sunday morning is associated with sleep-ins not 10.30 a.m. church!

<sup>1</sup> This contrasts with the plant in a pub in Nailsea in the South of England which really attracted unchurched people and non-church going husbands.

(c) The result of the satellite congregations that is most emphasized by St Luke's folk has been the opportunity for the laity to grow in faith and experience of their ministries. The small informal meeting places help them overcome their fears of leading or praying aloud as well as leaving behind expectations of clericalism. The pioneer opportunity of starting their own work draws out and extends their faith and tests all sorts of new gifts. There is a new motivation to fervent prayer which has undergirded all these developments. This goes hand in hand with a new sense of purpose and direction. The satellite also means a devolution of authority. This forces people to take more initiative without coming back to the centre and things even happen without the vicar knowing about it! A growing trust of one another has been observed and a confidence among each satellite in their lay ministry teams. It should be said that St Luke's had quite a large staff when this programme started, but it has not increased with the emergence of the two extra congregations. However their function has involved far more lay training for leadership and preaching—sometimes informal sessions, sometimes one to one. These conclusions tie in with the observation of others, that the level of lay ministry involvement in a growing church tends to go down proportionately when numbers start to exceed 175-200. Although with right leadership and special congregational structures/programmes this trend can be offset, multiplying congregations seems often to be the best way of maximizing lay ministry.

(d) The small size of the satellites has not only had its effect on the church members leading them. They have given the church a new image in the community of accessibility and vulnerability. Previously the full parish church had unwittingly created the impression of success—communicating the unspoken message that 'we don't need you'. In Bolton folk are not so much gospel-hardened as church-hardened. In part this was due to the rosy picture local people had of the church re-inforced by the press. In contrast the satellites struggling to launch themselves more readily seemed to say 'come and join us'. The slower growth of these satellites as they focus exclusively on local mission and evangelism also challenges St. Luke's to new understandings of what is fruitfulness as they give themselves to costly long term seed sowing and accept God's timing rather than theirs (see section 5, p.24). A final unexpected observation has been that some who had fallen out with the parish church have found a way back into fellowship through the satellites.

## 3. Challenges I see towards Parish re-structuring

These creative mission patterns at Bolton illustrate the point I made before, (p.22) that in some situations the parish boundary can make a positive contribution to church planting by not letting us escape a community-related evangelism strategy. St. Luke's awareness of their poor penetration of their parish population led them to the planting of these satellite congregations as well as implementing specific evangelism and ministry programmes aimed at better reaching the parish.

In this context, the findings of David Wasdell of the Urban Church Project (UCP) are relevant.<sup>1</sup> He argues that with all the population growth and

<sup>1</sup> A group called D.A.W.N. (Discipling a Whole Nation) have some conclusions in common with Wasdell. Their whole mission concept aims at establishing a congregation for every 800-1500 of population within a country.

## CHURCH PLANTING: 2. SOME EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

relocation over the centuries, existing parishes are rarely of the appropriate size to aid mission. From his impressive statistical survey of the Church of England he concludes that parishes are almost universally too large. The analysis shows that the single congregation is a self-limiting unit and that the average percentage parish penetration reduces in direct proportion to increasing parish population (when the effect of assistant clergy is excluded). In fact his figures show that when the population exceeds about 1750, the single congregation model gets progressively less effective.<sup>1</sup> Based on these findings, Wasdell argues powerfully for three main changes. Firstly, parish size should generally be reduced and related to community rather than geography. Secondly, congregations should be sub-divided into cells or house groups, which grow by division. Thirdly, congregations should multiply and be linked together in federation. I believe his work is a charter for church planting, which is confirmed by the experience at Bolton and so many other places now where mission and growth have been advanced by the multiplication of congregations as well as cells. There were already home cell groups at St. Luke's when parish penetration was still low and a further dimension of growth potential is opened up with multiple congregations. Both the establishment of cells and the creation of new congregations are vital church planting strategies and both need to be worked into a re-structured parish concept.

In fact St. Luke's, Bolton learnt from the multiplication of seven congregations at Chester-le-Street in County Durham from 1971 to 1982. Each of these area congregations were related to an identifiable community grouping within the town. Ian Bunting was the vicar there during much of this development and from that experience (related to a study of the third world Base Community movement), he sees the need to 're-discover the urban village'.<sup>2</sup> This challenges the church to analyse the true social and cultural groupings, which may bear little relationship to parish boundaries. The situation in places like Bolton, where ethnic populations play a significant part, further highlights this need for the local church to develop a multi-faceted structure for community-styled evangelism.

In this context, a recent observation of David Pawson seems relevant. He states that people used to live their lives in broadly three 'worlds'—a small world of family and friends, a middle world of local community and a large world of area/national events.<sup>3</sup> However, the trend in the West is that we live much more in a contracted small world of nuclear family and close friends and an enlarging big world brought to us by the media. Hence he sees the middle world of local community playing less and less part in our lives. On the other hand he points out that the parish church concept is aimed precisely at the disappearing 'middle world' and is therefore an increasingly less appropriate tool for church mission today. However, I believe that if we re-adjust our parish concept with the encouragement of cell groups and the planting of multiple congregations, then not only can we aim to reach people through their small world and networks of family and friends, we can actually begin to recreate community and restore the diminishing 'middle world'. This might be one way in which church mission could play a redeeming role in the structure of our society.

<sup>1</sup> David Wasdell, *Let my People Grow and Divide and Conquer*, (Urban Church Project Workpapers No. 1 & 2, 1974 & 75).

<sup>2</sup> Ian Bunting, *Claiming the Urban Village* (Grove series on Evangelism No. 7, 1989). This provides further sociological foundations for church planting evangelization.

<sup>3</sup> See also Gavin Reid, *To Reach a Nation* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1987) Ch.12!

## 2. CROSS-BOUNDARY TRANSPLANTS AND ALTERING OUR FOCUS

In September 1985 Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) had given 100 members and a curate to form a transplant into St. Barnabas, Kensington. This was still in the diocese of London although in a different deanery. Encouraged by this experience and the resulting growth, a second similar transplant was initiated, but this time into a different diocese.

### 1. The Story of St. Mark's, Battersea

In October 1987, after three years of negotiations with the Southwark diocese, permission was given to transplant another part of the HTB congregation. The group was led by one of the curates, the Rev Paul Perkin and this time the move was to a church south of the Thames. St Mark's Church in Battersea is a UPA parish although having very mixed housing and varied population both culturally and socially. The remaining congregation consisted of 12 to 20 mainly elderly people. The living had been suspended and handed over to the pastoral committee. It was shortly to be declared redundant. Although the project crossed the diocesan boundary, most, if not all of the trans-planted congregation of 70 people already lived in the area of Battersea, Clapham and Wandsworth. It was therefore from the start an indigenous work—what I classified as a 'progression plant' in the first booklet.

Within just 8 months the congregation had grown to about 200. This had been achieved mainly by drawing in the unchurched and people with a fringe church background who lived in the area but weren't really linked into a church. As far as they know, the growth was not by transfer from other churches, indeed they are aware that they have transferred more out to local churches than they have received from them. Growth has continued and by May 1989, less than two years after the transplant, numbers reached 250.

### 2. Some Lessons and Principles

(a) Both transplants from HTB have been based on planting from strength in strength. They foresee only rare opportunities to plant across parish boundaries and these are likely to be in near-redundant church situations with problems of finance, buildings and plant. There will also be inevitable opposition and substantial legal and institutional formalities. Thus, planting *from* strength enables them to handle all the negotiations, convince those who might oppose and resource the problems. Unlike the house churches, there is not the freedom to survey and choose the best area and facilities, so planting *in* strength enables the new congregation to do certain vital things immediately, e.g., to establish new worship patterns, start house groups, staff the administrative challenges of a rundown situation and finance the building repairs. So planting in strength refers to quality as well as quantity and the challenge to the 'home church' is to give of your best people. In the case of St. Mark's, about 50 of the total group of 70 were trained and equipped leaders already ministering in various areas of church life at HTB. This is therefore a sacrificial giving away of large numbers, of key leaders, and, of committed givers.

Paul Perkin has observed that the make-up of the group in terms of marrieds and singles, younger and older people, produces different advantages and disadvantages. Their group included a large number of

married couples with families who have more resources in terms of the maturity of their faith, their training and experience of ministry. They also have more contacts in the community with a longer-term home situation, larger sitting rooms to meet in, etc. But they can have less time and energy while raising families and sometimes less money with the demands of the children and mortgages. Their children are also a considerable responsibility for the developing churches' ministry in the early stages.

(b) Unlike the parish satellite, this type of transplant embraces buildings problems rather than stepping free from them. In the case of St. Mark's, Battersea, these were very considerable burdens—the worst being the fact that the tower was gradually sinking into the river Falcon, over which the church had been sited when it was built in the 1870's. However, this situation need not all be negative. Provided you plant with sufficient strength, the building can work for you. Going to a run-down situation, a great deal of excitement and challenge was generated with a sense of purpose and vision as they engaged on a number of projects—starting with a heating system, a PA system and then the restoration of the crypt, before tackling the major works to prevent the building collapsing!

(c) The third principle relates to time-scale. They believe that church planters have an urgency not because they are impatient by temperament, but because of the expectation of growth in their congregation and the actual experience of it that they are witnessing and of which they are a part. They see the need for the hierarchy to recognize that the situation of a leader moving with 70-100 people in a church planting venture is very different from the traditional situation of say, the evangelical incumbent who moves with a long-term view of turning a parish around over a period of several years. This relates to procedures, such as the 12 months delay and tying up administrative resources in the bureaucracy involved in obtaining plans and a faculty for renovations. Much more importantly it also affects staff appointments. For example, within a year there was a need at St. Mark's to appoint a secretary, a part-time administrative assistant and a pastoral assistant (a couple or a single man from theological college).

### 3. Challenges I put to re-adjust our Focus.

I am aware from correspondence that some church leaders find this transplant model hard to accept, especially when many members of the large transplant group already live in the area of the new 'plant'. The two main arguments seem to be as follows. Firstly, these Christians should have got stuck in at their local church in the first place and it would never have been threatened with closure. Secondly, having drawn away Christians from other churches to a strong 'super-church' they will now compound the problem by drawing away further Christians to these 'exciting pioneer church planting projects'. (This view of a two phased 'sheep stealing' has been described as 'bindweed church planting'!)

Now I sympathize with any church leader who loses faithful members to another church, especially if they are struggling. However, these arguments could possibly be a warning that a wrong perspective can come into our thinking if we become increasingly gripped by defensiveness in the face of church decline. A fortress mentality can easily creep upon us as we seek to hang on to each remaining member of our congregation.

I suggest that we can get a wrong focus in two main respects and these are exposed by re-examining some of Jesus's words. Firstly . . . 'Lift up your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest' (John 4.35) . . . Jesus directs us to look to the harvest *out there* . . . whereas we can focus on the dwindling grain in 'our barn'. Jesus gives a model of leaving the 99 in the fold to seek for the lost. We could get to the place where we are hanging on so hard to the one in the fold that we ignore the 99 that are lost. We fear what we might lose rather than look to what might be gained for the kingdom of God. Do we need to restore a prime focus on evangelism and be less pre-occupied with looking over our shoulder?

Secondly, Jesus said. . . 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers' . . . (Matt. 9.37-8). As leaders the resource we need to fulfil the task of evangelism and mission is WORKERS not church attenders. I suspect that when church members are drawn away to 'super-churches' or church plants, it may sometimes be because they were not being trained for and mobilized as workers in the harvest. I don't believe Jesus was talking about people who filled pews in which they merely got exhorted to witness to and serve their neighbours. The workers he was talking about would be people who had leaders who first *showed* them how evangelism was done by doing it with them and then *shared* with them the power and authority they would need to do it (after all that's how he sent out his workers/disciples).

At several times Jesus emphasized the workers' responsibility to bear fruit. As leaders we have the power to influence the fruitfulness of our ministry. However, we often seem blind to the fact that 'followers' do not have this same freedom and power—it is substantially determined by how much we are prepared to enable them and share ministry with them. Therefore, where a church leader does not want or know how to liberate his 'followers' into fruitful work—then their only freedom may be to go somewhere where the leader does ('the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit'—Matt. 21.43). We need to be as vigorous in asking what church members have been drawn away from as in questioning what they have been drawn to. I think it will rarely be from churches where they had full opportunity and equipping to be involved in both evangelism and a full range of church ministries.

However, a third criticism of church plants is I believe one we need to heed very carefully. That is the allegation that we come into an area and make no effort whatever to relate to the other churches working there. It seems to me essential that we talk with other leaders and seek to co-operate wherever possible/practical. However, here again there is a challenge to be honest and not to 'double think' about unity. I seem to hear many talk of their ecumenical links with Roman Catholics or Methodists and criticize as un-ecumenical those who work together with Pentecostals or house churches! We in the historic denominations seem to forget that we once were the 'break-aways' or 'pushed-outs'. I am not happy when Michael Griffiths classifies all church planting in the UK as 'schismatic out-step' or 'schismatic in-push'—unless it is denominational daughter church planting.<sup>1</sup> The pentecostals and house church movement are part of the current UK church scene and their church plants are as legitimate as ours—a further 200 years of church history won't make them any more legitimate—although as they lose some of their vitality and radical cutting edge, we may feel more comfortable in legitimizing them!

<sup>1</sup> Michael Griffiths, *How to Plant Churches* (Marc Europe, 1984), p126-7.

### 3. MOBILE SEED TEAMS AND MAKING UNITY WORK

We have looked at an example of teams planting within the parish and of large group transplants crossing parish and other boundaries in a major city. However, if the church planting evangelism and mission dynamic is to be spread further afield, then one of the ideal agents is the sort of small 'seed team' that I have described. This model was the one that we were led to as we followed our own developing church planting vision and calling. Parts of the story have already been told and I will concentrate on the aspects relating to the seed team model.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The Story of Holy Trinity, Parr Mount, St Helen

Rev. Chris Woods was appointed vicar of this urban industrial parish in 1979. The housing is a mixture of urban terraces, 1930's council estates and newer council developments of the 1960's following area clearance and a new road scheme. It was a classic UPA parish situation at that time with only one or two members of the remaining congregation living within the parish and the 30 to 40 others all living well outside, many in middle class areas. 18 of the 22 PCC members lived outside the parish. As I have explained, this is effectively a church planting situation, since a radical mission work has to be started to reach the parish community and create a new local congregation.<sup>2</sup> Chris Woods' appointment was in reality as a pioneer church planter and he was to discover firstly, that most of the existing members did not welcome the changes that were needed to introduce mission and ministry that would be necessary to reach the very depressed situation that they had left behind. Secondly, the depth of human needs in the area around the church led him to feel that for all his efforts, things only seemed to get worse rather than better.

It was out of this situation which brought him to a place of real brokenness by 1981, that he saw God leading in a link-up with St Andrews, Chorleywood. This relationship first provided some relevant local evangelism through 'faith sharing team' visits and then opened the way for us to come with a team to live in the parish in summer 1983. The team that God put together consisted of my wife Mary and me from Christ Church, Chorleywood, Tim Humphrey from St Andrews and John and Michele Walker who had just been with Youth With A Mission (Y.W.A.M.) for 18 months after having been previously vicar in Everton. In the following three years many local people came to faith in Christ. Of these a lot joined the church, although this was a painfully hard process due to the frequency of very broken backgrounds and the volatility of relationships within the relatively tight-knit local community. Most would come and go for a period of anything up to two years before any regular membership emerged and for quite a few we were not able to see their commitment stick. Nonetheless a real local congregation was planted within three years with numbers around 150 including children. At that time most of the team left and the struggle since has been to keep the emphasis local. Partly the witness of the new local Christians to their family and friends has brought in whole networks of people from outside the parish, whilst others in the town have been attracted to the ministry that has developed.

<sup>1</sup> Seed team described in first booklet p.14, also see *Renewal* No 142, 1988, p.8, and Barry Kissell, *Walking on Water* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1986) Ch 7.

<sup>2</sup> First booklet pp.20-21, para (b) and diagrams (vi) and (vii)

#### 2. Some Lessons and Principles

(a) Incarnation and the Cross-Cultural Challenge: Our six years here in Parr Mount, St Helens have confirmed over again the incarnational principle and the importance of a church planting seed team fully identifying with the mission area by living in the heart of the parish—whatever the area. All five who moved here in summer '83 initially lived in two terraced houses and a third house was later purchased for £4000 by one of our 'home' churches.

Many have asked whether the influx of five 'outsiders' was not a block to the development of local Christians and their growth into leadership. Our answer is a resounding NO—*provided* the team's whole motivation is to bring local folk to a relationship with Christ, build them up in it and then to give away the teams' ministries to them.<sup>1</sup> We saw that within two years of the project, there were local Christians running home groups, a hospital visiting team and worship group. Many have served in an outreach group and a pastoral visiting team, and there are over 40 in the healing ministry team. Lots of local Christians lead worship services and some preach very well. David Newton has pointed out, this may be an essential factor for creating a truly urban church which will attract other working class folk.<sup>2</sup> After three years, three of the original team moved on and a year later we too became less involved in the running of the parish. To achieve this objective of planting a local church for local people who minister to the local community it had to be constantly kept as priority. Initially the pressure to abandon the policy came from those who had long ago moved out of the parish. Later, as the church grew, the challenge also came from Christian folk wanting to join us from outside the parish. This was discouraged unless there was a very strong commitment to join the mission to the locality and preferably to seek to move in. For us, moving from South to North and from commuter belt to UPA involved bigger cultural readjustment than when we moved to Brazil for two years. I believe that cross-cultural evangelism is a gift that some have more than others—our training in flexibility in Brazil was God's preparation for us. Nonetheless, the main pattern of evangelism has been our building up and training of the local Christians to enable them to reach their families, friends, neighbours and workmates.

(b) Team lessons: We believe that our experience has proved beyond doubt the strengths of the mobile pioneer team concept to provide the concerted strength for change and in-depth local mission in pioneer situations such as UPA's. Firstly, with some longstanding church attenders from well outside the parish who had previously 'run' the church, it was not easy to press through the necessary changes for local mission and relevance. Secondly, team members support one another through the great emotional stresses of constant disappointments as one tries to establish new believers who are almost all fearfully broken and from desperate home situations. Furthermore, when all the church members are new Christians there are few immediate potential leaders.

<sup>1</sup> Some helpful advice on this approach and attitudes required is given in the article by Robert Patterson and Roger Sainsbury, *Planting Churches—Heaven Forbid!* (Church Leader issue No 1, CPAS, 1986)

<sup>2</sup> D. Newton, 'Why no super churches?', *Church Growth Digest* 10.1, 1988, p.8.

## CHURCH PLANTING: 2. SOME EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

However, there are many strains of learning to work together in a team, especially when the seven members (five plus vicar and his wife) have been drawn from four different churches. We needed to learn to love and not feel threatened by one another, to value our different contributions rather than compete with each other. Chris (our vicar) provided strong, visionary leadership and a gift for urban evangelism (eg. taking the gospel to the pub). Others brought gifts of worship-leading, pastoring and teaching as well as gifts of administration, handling finances, healing and counselling. As we released one another into the gifts God had given us, we found great joy and mutual strength, which triumphed over the difficulties and pain of working together.

(c) Evangelism Methods: Perhaps our evangelism could be summed up in Paul's words 'that by all possible means I might save some' (1 Cor. 9.22). The foundation was laid by Chris and his gift with local men and baptism families. Another team member had a special gift with funerals and bereavement visiting. These were built on by two faith-sharing visits from St. Andrews, Chorleywood, which focused on informal loosely-led discussion groups in the homes of parishioners. These and the follow-up nurture materials have to be simple to meet the needs of this non-book culture. The faith-sharing visits also involved healing meetings at which many experienced the power of God in remarkable ways. The combined effect of these sharing groups and experiences of 'seeing God in action' created a great impetus for the gospel to be talked about at the many points of contact in the area (a real sense of community is preserved here with folk chatting on street corners, outside shops and constantly dropping in for a cuppa!) This momentum has led on to open air meetings in the town centre with singing, testimonies, drama, dance/mime and preaching (sometimes with sketchboard). Teams have also been trained for outreach and pastoral visiting. They would be open to discuss their relationship with Jesus or to pray for anyone with any need in the household (practical help to the old or handicapped has also been given).

We are convinced that Jesus's threefold ministry that Matthew saw as so important (Matt. 4.23 and repeated in 9.35) was not only to be the model for the early disciples (Matt. 10.7-8 and 28.20) but also for us today. This was (i) simple proclamation of the challenge of God's love and lordship (ii) teaching and training by apprenticeship (to be done by those with more experience—hence only authorized in Matt. 28 not 10) and (iii) visible works of both power and compassion. Aiming for this full range of evangelism in church planting may give rise to lots of problems and hard questions but the fruit has been undeniable in transforming people's lives who in turn embrace the vision to evangelize in the same way.

We have also seen the significance of praying in 'spiritual warfare' as we were aware of the almost tangible power of the darkness from which people are to be brought into his marvellous light. Startling cases of the dramatic effectiveness of linking this sort of prayer with evangelism have been too numerous to discount.

(d) Church Group Life and Leadership: It has been challenging to try to establish home cell groups appropriate to a non-book culture. We have seen the groups as extensions of the ministry of the whole church. Therefore they express their shared life in worship, praying together,

learning and sharing together and enjoying fellowship. Learning together has been helped by a simple leader's manual from Latin America which was the only material suitable for facilitating local leaders (S.E.A.N. Bible Encounter Manual). Bible sharing based on a 'wordsearch' has also been most fruitful. It enables knowledge to be drawn from the group as a word such as 'hope', 'light' or 'leadership' is chosen and folk share favourite passages, stories or characters from the bible to illustrate the word. The small group is also the learning situation where members feel safe in venturing out to pray for one another or discover gifts together.

In the ongoing life of the groups, we have found it important to identify certain key roles and to ensure their distribution between groups. This has been particularly crucial when groups grow and sub-divide. The roles are: the hosts, the worship leader, the catalyst or 'mixer', the teaching supervisor and key committed members who are regular and share the vision for the group. The overall leader can be any one of the above and will obviously exercise a key ministry, although we have found the role of the 'mixer' almost as vital (these stimulate a friendly atmosphere, facilitate discussion and care for those who might get left out).

The development of leaders is perhaps the biggest challenge in church planting in this UPA. It is hard to see any way to quick leadership development in a situation where few have known the discipline of regular attendance at anything (neither school nor job) and relationships have often been deeply broken. Often there is the nagging feeling that this is a failure on our part and that we have too narrow a model of leadership. On the other hand, one wonders if such monochrome communities were non-existent prior to the industrial revolution and Paul would have had a range of backgrounds to deal with in any church planting in city or town. We continue to learn, seek more answers and learn again.

(e) Finance and Buildings: Within eighteen months of the team arriving the critical stagnation in church income compared to escalating costs of old uneconomic buildings had brought us to a substantial overdraft. The trend that had led to this was a worsening one and we were heading for 'bankruptcy'. When this was appreciated we first carried out a radical review of areas of possible savings that could be quickly implemented. This was followed by a decision to exercise some faith in this area and the church started to give away 10% of its income. Most significantly the church heating system broke down and was beyond our means to repair and so we moved worship services out into a church hall in the morning and rented a school on Sunday evenings. This produced a dramatic change in the warmth of the fellowship life (not to mention the convenience of toilets and kitchen) and improved the experience of worship—as the members were no longer 'lost' in a large 'barn'. This in turn produced one of the most rapid phases of growth in the church and a complete turnaround in the finances—giving doubled in eighteen months. Giving away has now also gone up to 30% and we have been able to meet our commitments throughout.

### 3. Questions about Church Unity

(a) Working together and making unity work: Although church planting seems to have been given a reputation for division, I believe that many involved in church planting have a particular desire for unity to be expressed. The church plant we have been involved in at Holy Trinity has had some influence in this regard. The population of St. Helens is at least half Roman Catholic by background and with the advantage of a vicar's wife who is a practising Catholic we have been able to minister to many Catholic families. Visitation teams when met with the answer 'No thank you I'm a Catholic'—are often greeted with the reply 'So is the vicar's wife, would you like her to visit?'. We have also started a leaders' fraternal in the town including representatives from the whole range from Catholic priest to house church leaders.

Unity was also expressed in the make-up of the team that came to Merseyside with us. Originally three different churches were represented and as some have left to new ministries, first a couple came to join the team from a pentecostal church in the USA and as they left us a couple have joined us from the pastorate of a united Methodist-Presbyterian church in New Zealand. This gives a glimpse of the possibilities that church planting might have, of not just talking with other Christian groups about unity—but actually working with them. I believe we shall see more and more teams coming together from widely different backgrounds in order to be involved in planting a church together—which may have a label different from any of the team constituents' original churches! Teams embodying true unity will then express that unity as they are ready to work alongside any other denomination where a church planting project is agreed.

I believe that there are many other ways in which church planting patterns can work for unity and also make powerful statements of unity to the world. A story that I like in this context is that of Dave Cave in Liverpool. Having started a radical evangelism programme with the youth of Anfield, he found that the youngsters who were responding were not readily assimilated into the local churches. He was not prepared to abandon the mission that was bearing such fruit so he continued building up the group of young Christians. Then when he recognized that they were reaching the point of becoming a congregation—rather than form another independent church, he opened negotiations with existing church denominations to find one that would take him and his band under their umbrella. As a result they have been accepted as an 'associate fellowship' of the URC and so the work has flourished *and* been linked with one of the historic churches. Furthermore, they pass some converts to other churches in the area. They have provided evangelism programmes for other churches, including on one occasion a group of ten churches with Anglican, Methodist and Baptist involvement. The fellowship has also a 'twinning' arrangement with a URC church in Tiverton and Anglicans in St Albans, with lots of beneficial interchange.<sup>1</sup>

The many ecumenical church plants are further encouraging examples of this. Some are formal Local Ecumenical Projects (LEP's) but lots of others are link-ups with other denominations which are not legally formulated. Examples include the UPA plants with the Methodists, one in a shop-front in Benwell, Newcastle-on-Tyne and another in an old folks home in Mansfield.

<sup>1</sup> Dave Cave, *Ten New Churches*, (MARK Europe, 1986) Ch. 4.

I would love to see increasing emphasis on ecumenical church plants. However, some church planters with an ecumenical heart, argue that in the present environment in which any church plant is a radical breakthrough, to expect this additional dimension may often be unrealistic. The struggles with institutional reaction for permission for a cross-boundary plant are already protracted and subject to a low success rate. So, to add the requirements of obtaining LEP co-operation and approval is likely to set such a threshold that those with the vision and commitment to carry through such challenging and costly projects are likely to have pushed an easier door. But, paradoxically, others foresee that in some areas an ecumenical dimension could actually make the diocesan response more favourable.

(b) Standing where our brother stands: We all share the human failing of tending only to see things from where we are and hence to concentrate on what we perceive as the weaknesses of our brother's position and to ignore those of our own. Thus I need to hear the comments of those not involved in church planting who feel that we in this movement are triumphalist, sectarian and have no understanding of the struggles of many other faithful Christian ministers who labour in difficult and sacrificial situations. On the other hand, those outside rarely seem to appreciate the sacrificial cost involved in giving away one's best assistant staff, lay leaders and financial givers in order to see new works start elsewhere. Often, those involved in church planting have themselves first faced total failure and powerlessness in ministry situations which have broken them. The contrast between these arid desert experiences and the fruitfulness and fulfilment of church planting mission may perhaps cause them to show an insensitive over-enthusiasm. However, we must not make a virtue of fruitless faithfulness that is needless. Sacrificial faithfulness with little to show for it may sometimes be needed, especially to pioneer fruitful missionary models—but we should not be ashamed of fruitfulness.

(c) A grid to hold together quite different functions: A sociological analysis which talks of a 'sodality' and 'modality' has been applied to the church by Ralph Winter (*Missiology* Jan. 1974) and quoted by Roy Pointer in *How to Plant Churches* (*Op. cit.* p.3). This analysis is helping with the questions of ecclesiology that have been raised as well as pointing to further potential for unity. Modality refers to the structures and institutions that enable the church to span generations and be strengthened by the heritage of church tradition. Sodality on the other hand, refers to the 'more committed' within the organization who challenge and service the church of this generation to produce the vitality to change and meet current needs.

On the one hand this gives us a grid to understand how more radical new, growth-orientated, church-planting initiatives can fit into the overall church. On the other, it should help those of us who find ourselves and our calling more in one expression than the other, to appreciate, mutually respect and want to support the other's contribution, rather than being threatened and trying to ignore or suppress the other's calling. Historically, the monastic movement and the religious orders fit into this sociological analysis and they have also shown the ability to release the pioneer missionary spirit whilst preserving the overall unity of the church. Of particular interest in this context, are the Lee Abbey III initiatives to plant small communities into urban areas in Birmingham and elsewhere.

## 4. THE FRUSTRATED PLANT AND THE CHURCH INSTITUTIONAL

### 1. The Story of one City Centre Church

I could choose many other places with exciting stories of parishes involved in church planting. However, to present a fair picture we also need to hear one of the stories of frustration and blocked opportunity. If it seems depressing and critical, it is not intended to be, but rather realistically to present the challenge of church planting to our existing structures. It is the tale of a city centre church, told from the incumbent's perspective.

This evangelical city centre church is surrounded by businesses, students, a prison, and also a small geographical parish of just 1800 people, many in hostels. Some eight years ago growth started and soon the building capacity of some 300 was not sufficient to accommodate the congregation. The first solution investigated was to move buildings. In consultation with the diocese a number of alternative buildings were assessed. However, none on offer or around were suitable since they involved loss of contact with either the city centre or the parish area. The idea of splitting the church to start another in the same parish was rejected. As a city centre church in a small parish this would produce simply a parallel church to the existing one and they saw no justification of the expense of running two buildings. Therefore instead they divided the congregation and ran two identical services, one after another, creating two congregations within the same building. They did not consider this situation very satisfactory, seeing it as dividing what was really meant to be one, but they continued like this for two years. The decision was then reached that they ought to seek to start a church in another area rather than the city centre. Three attempts were made at this, all of them unsuccessful.

Firstly they tried for a church that was just across the road from the parish boundary. It was in a residential UPA area, but part of the same social grouping as their own. The parish ministry there had hit hard times with six attending in the morning and three in the evening. It was found that a group of their members had in fact moved there and had a real concern for the area. The local residents association also approached the vicar asking if he would start some work in their area and start something for their church. Permission was requested to take this church over and to start by moving a group of members from the city centre church. After various discussions with the diocese it was decided that this was not possible. Instead, that parish was linked into a team ministry with another weak church in its area and the building closed. In any case the congregational remnant was of a different churchmanship and strongly opposed. Before its closure an appeal was made to the diocesan authorities to be allowed three years to look after it on the basis that if it was not then full and self-supporting, it could then be closed. But it was decided to proceed with closure.

The next initiative involved a church which had been planted by the city centre church 75 years ago, but which had now run into difficult times. A different approach was tried here, having found that a number of their

own members lived in that area. It was suggested to the diocese that their curate should be made priest in charge of that parish and take with him all the members who lived in that part of the city. Although initially more warmly received, in the end the diocese ruled that it was too senior a position for the curate who was judged to have had insufficient experience. But perhaps the crucial obstacle was that the PCC concerned preferred the traditional model of a strong new incumbent to joining in partnership with the city centre members and their curate.

Another church was then tried, this being adjacent to the parish with 7000 people living around it. Having hit particularly bad times there were now single figures attending the one Sunday service, with no other meetings, no organist, treasurer, wardens or PCC left. A group were organized to move into the same street and to meet, pray and grow in concern for the area. At around this point the incumbent of that parish left. The offer was made to the diocese that the city centre vicar resign and move there, if they agreed to combine the parishes as a group, with his curate taking over the city centre church. After discussion the proposal was turned down on the grounds that that parish, although in difficult times, more naturally related to another parish.

Having failed three times, the P.C.C. reluctantly decided to embark on a major building project to increase seating capacity and this was completed in 1988. They have explained to the diocese that they are not discouraged—God having done other things with them in the intervening time. They are thankful for their bishop's spiritual leadership and fellowship which they have shared. Furthermore they accept that they may have been impatient with some of the structures and insensitive in the midst of it all. Therefore they have put forward to the diocese that following re-opening of their new building they hope to fill it under God and then in 1990 they would want to plant another church. They requested that over that period of time consideration be given to where they could be allowed to plant the church.

### 2. Lessons learnt and Principles emerging

Many with a heart for the church and restoring its witness and ministry have been deeply saddened by this sort of developments. Is it church politics and the disease of committees that produce such inflexibility and lack of adventure? (a layman, after attending an Advisory Council meeting of another diocese, observed that "if my company board responded to new proposals so negatively they would go out of business. I see more faith at my work!").<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that this case history illustrates the sort of lost mission opportunities likely to be produced by current structures and prevailing strategies of retrenchment. Whilst the institution may be questioning the appropriateness of church planting, I believe that in reality church planting initiatives highlight questions about our structures. How appropriate and responsive are they either to our present society or to the actual locations of the resources and energy for regeneration which are primarily to be found in our growing evangelizing congregations? To criticize them

<sup>1</sup> By contrast, Southwell diocese has actually circulated all parishes with instructions on how to plan for church planting—see Appendix 1.

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as 'eclectic' is merely to point on the one hand to the inevitable dynamic of growth (Acts 5.16), and on the other hand to the reality of mobility and dispersed networks of relationships in modern cities, which render old structures less appropriate.

My conviction is that the time has come for facing hard realities. Even if the momentum of a vast institution such as the C of E could carry it on through the coming decade and for a further century—that has little to do with the mission imperative and dynamic of the New Testament. Our only hope for short term effectiveness and long term survival is to recognize our massive inbuilt resistance to change and boldly to embrace radical initiatives. What about a decade of experimentation in this sphere to match that which facilitated liturgical renewal. Imagine a rash of provisional mission areas, conventional districts, many suspended livings re-opening for church planting plans, an amnesty on all cross-boundary plants in non-licensed premises . . . etc, etc.

Is our response a rising panic? Where is the order? However, church planters from abroad have pointed out that their experience of growth conforms to Paul's instruction to Titus—'I left you in Crete to straighten out what was left unfinished and to appoint . . .' (Tit. 1.5). They observe that this implies a principle of first spreading life to which order then has to be applied, rather than the current tendency of spreading new patterns of order in the often vain hope that it will generate life.

### 3. Challenges to the Church Institutional

In my first booklet, I presented the parable of an ancient olive tree—preserved as a relic, supposedly dating back BC. Now the Greek islanders can afford the 'archaeological luxury' of putting efforts into maintaining the fragile, fruitless life of that olive tree of antiquity because they continue to plant and cultivate hosts of new young trees with great vigour and fruitfulness. If they had not, they would have virtually ceased to be olive harvesters! Thus we must always be reviewing the structures of our church institutional to see whether there is life flowing up the trunk—or hollowness; whether we are endlessly propping up limbs that barely maintain the marks of the species, let alone reproduce it. A third world church leader is quoted as saying, 'The problem with the Anglican Church is that it is "menopausal"—it's lost the ability to bear children!'

We have recognized that church planting evangelism is radical for the U.K. and for the Church of England in particular. Therefore it is bound to challenge the existing structure of the institution in some fundamental aspects. When we find areas where church planting confronts the institution with a 'no-fit' situation, we should not automatically conclude that church planting is the problem. Rather, let us have the courage to look closer at the challenges and at their implications for the institution.

(a) The Parish Boundary: The great strength of the parish system over the centuries is fully acknowledged.<sup>1</sup> We have already recognized that to some extent the diversity and attractiveness of Church of England church plants may owe something to the very need to wrestle with the parish boundary and so not escape a community-related mission. However, I

<sup>1</sup> J. Tiller, *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* (C.I.O. 1983), p.74f

believe these benefits could be preserved, without many of the negative affects of the current operation of the boundary system which threaten to outweigh the advantages. The parish boundary has been described at its worst, as operating in some situations as 'a line drawn round thousands of people to protect them from hearing the Gospel'. Another quote is relevant here, this time from John Finney, when he refers to the sort of situation 'where there are few on the electoral roll, the wrong people in office and all energies on maintenance', and goes on to say that 'it cannot be right that the opinions of a handful of people, forced into a defensive position by the situation, should prevent the evangelizing of many thousands'.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the parish boundaries, operated in their present form, may have served well for centuries should not lead us to assume their universal suitability. When an environment is both uniform and stable a structure well adapted to it will automatically continue to prove itself. It is only when the environment changes or becomes substantially diverse that such a structure, if it is not able to adapt, is exposed as inadequate. The need in today's diverse and changing society is not to do away with a parish boundary system, but to change its form (ie the size of parish) and to release its application to a flexibility that allows for, and reacts positively to, authentic mission developments. In short the challenge to the present parish boundary system is to change from an outdated monument to maintenance into a facilitating agent—a tool like a sharpening stone for mission and evangelism.

(b) Patronage, freehold and a rigid legal framework: Our inflexible, legally formulated patterns of ministry with freeholds and patronage seem to be one of the major blocks to the establishment of *mission areas* which have been repeatedly identified as so urgently needed and are so relevant to church planting plans. Our systems and structures should allow for the equivalent of good 'woodland husbandry'. Where a tree is becoming weak and unproductive, a program of selective re-planting is the answer to ensure we don't end up with de-afforestation due to neglect. With our inability to close a work, to start another or to radically change its form, how much mission potential do we lock up? I see desperate waste of resources here in terms of consumed institutional energy on propping up the out-dated; of dissipation of leaders, morale and of disillusioned congregations.

Our canon law relating to certain worship practice militates powerfully against the flexibility and adaptability required for cultural appropriateness. Vincent Donovan (*Christianity Rediscovered*) made the point that if we go to a different culture and preach the church, then there will be a response and that response will be the church: and it will be very similar to the church which sent us to preach the gospel. If, however, we do as St. Paul did, and preach Jesus, then too there will be a response, and that response will be the church: but it may be very different from the church we had in mind when we first set out. David Sheppard applies this principle when he observes that 'instead of learning from St. Paul who said he became like a Jew to win Jews and like a Gentile to win Gentiles, we have tried to have a blueprint of church life, and then expect every social group to fit in with our ways. There *is* one gospel, but both its presentation and its outworkings should have a different flavour in different cultures and social groupings *within a nation no less than in, for example, Asia and Europe*' (italic mine).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Finney, Paper: *Mission and the parochial boundary*, available from the present author (38 Lascelles Street, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 1BA).

<sup>2</sup> D. Sheppard, *Built as a City* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p.42

Certainly the rate of change and cultural diversity within our country now, compared to when these statements were made, should be even stronger reason to support such a radical conclusion. If we do want to liberate the gospel in our country from cultural imperialism as well as avoid it abroad, we shall have to work for institutional change wherever it presents a block to cultural appropriateness. For example, we should not only stop exporting robed choirs and *Hymns Ancient and Modern* to African villages, but also recognize that robes on clergy are inappropriate for many UPA church plants (let alone for planting a punk church or congregation for the night club community).<sup>1</sup> In urban areas this canonical requirement can powerfully reinforce a 'patronizing paternalism' of clerical ministry. It tunes in to white collar/manual; boss/worker assumptions and inhibits the development of a fully shared local ministry and leadership. This is not to say that urban, as third world, parishes can't love their robed priests and take them to their hearts if they give themselves in loving service to them. But it could make it almost impossible for them ever to see themselves on the same level as the priest and rise to share fully all the ministry with him. This change in self-image and understanding is at the heart of effective church planting which requires the laity to rise to the challenge of taking their full part in evangelism and leadership. We have legally enshrined what ought to be simply culturally related.

As we pursue radical church planting projects aimed at establishing truly local congregations, we may also find a pressing argument for lay presidency at the eucharist. Pragmatically this may be a strong reason for seeking a formal LEP setting for such initiatives, with regular lay celebrations under Free Church authority. Could we later foresee the Church of England applying local ordained ministry plans (L.O.M.) to all sorts of different groups—without a three year cultural de-programming course?

(c) Institutional-ism: All churches are institutions and each new church plant extends the institution. However, institutionalism is when the structures get out of balance and become an end in themselves.

The following developments may ring some warning bells for the Church of England in this context: Following publication and presentation to General Synod of the findings and recommendations for parish changes of David Wasdell and the UCP, he believes that a strange pattern of events resulted. His contract was prematurely terminated and the UCP was disbanded long before its planned duration. Wasdell found this response so remarkable that he researched into this and what he saw as similar self-protecting, change-resisting mechanisms in institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, the institutional church seems often to react as one who through fear of the future escapes from the present and lives in the past. Obvious major trends shaping the future are the increasing rate of change and pluralism in society. God calls for a response which will need to have hallmarks of flexibility, adaptability and variety.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Warren, *In the Crucible*, (Highland, 1989), see Ch. 12

<sup>2</sup> He found them more or less universal and suggests that they are a threat to the ability of institutions to adapt and change to survive changing circumstances. To follow this up he has formed URCHIN (unit for research into changing institutions) which now has sponsorships from the UN and multi-nationals, but not UK churches! It is important for us to ask whether there is a need for us to repent and look again at these challenges? I realize that others involved in these events may have other interpretations!

## 5. PLANTING UNITS, EVANGELISM AND MINISTRY TRAINING

In my first booklet I identified a number of planting units and from the case histories told here, I would extend and slightly modify my analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Firstly, we can see the place of the *individual* planter on his own, as when Chris Woods started at Holy Trinity, Parr Mount, to plant a full local UPA church. There are many other examples of this, including curates or Church Army officers moving into a new area. More unusual is the story of a lay couple who moved into a new council estate in the 60s and started a church in their home which led to the planting of a church.<sup>2</sup> This model merits consideration but the stress and demands on the individual planter and his family should never be underestimated. Secondly, there is the small *team* of 3-12 people. This has the great advantage of support and fellowship from the very beginning and of providing a range of gifts and ministries to increase effectiveness and penetration in mission. Of the range of gifts required, I believe that the pioneer evangelist is the most important. Ideally the team should also include somewhere, gifts of discipling/pastoring to build up new believers, worship leadership, helping and administration. This team model is especially effective for going to plant into very difficult areas. I see an analogy here to the Old Testament prophet's exhortation to 'break up your fallow ground' (Jer. 4.3 and Hos. 10.12). In a hardened area that has not been well worked, as with a plough, you need a sharp point—equivalent to the thrust of the pioneer evangelist—and the accompanying weight to force it through—equivalent to the team support.

Thirdly, there is the case where the planting unit is itself of congregational proportions and we have called this a '*transplant*'. The numbers are likely to vary from 500-100 in this country and the H.T.B. stories fall in this range. Even larger transplants are not uncommon in the USA. Obviously such ventures are limited in the distance they can move from their sending church. However, if the mother church is strong enough to adopt this model, it reduces many of the risks and early trials of the smaller planting units. The plant starts immediately with congregational life, with its accompanying sub-structure of home cells and with all the resources in terms of leadership and developed ministries. Its capacity for growth is, therefore, determined much more by the replication of a successful quality of body-life from the mother church, than by the special gifting of an individual or of team members.

The fourth planting unit is the *group*, ranging from 15 to 40. This is often used for establishing satellite congregations, such as in the story we have told of St. Luke's, Bolton. I explain this model last because it is part-way between the team and the transplant. There can be a confusion of identity as to whether it is a large team or a small transplant and I see the need to be aware of certain dangers. The group of 15-40 is not yet a congregation in its own right. Therefore it will not usually have the growth dynamic in its corporate identity in the way that the transplant does. Thus even though it is larger than the team plant, I believe that it is still just as dependent on the pioneer gifting of individuals within it if it is to have the capacity for rapid

<sup>1</sup> *Op. Cit.*, p.16, section (a).

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Capenerhurst, *You in Your Small Corner* (IVF, 1967).

growth. However, this is often not appreciated and groups may be sent off to unchurched housing estates within a parish, expecting the group life and witness to yield growth naturally. Many cases are proving that this does not happen and one reason may be the failure to realize that the pioneer evangelist and discipler are just as necessary to provide the thrust into the new area as with a small team plant of 3-12.

Church-planting is showing the crucial importance of the evangelist for the mission of the church. I believe it is also highlighting that whilst a few may be itinerant, their key role is in church-based evangelism where they also train other emerging evangelists and, even more important, equip the whole body for works of witness. Evangelists may see Philip as their role model and claim his ministry establishes it as an itinerant function in Acts 8 (Samaria and Gaza). However, his travelling throughout Samaria was no different from any of the Christians dispersed by the persecution of Saul (those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went (8.4)). Furthermore, after the 'one-off' foray to Gaza, he travels about a little more until he reaches Caesarea (8.40) and when Paul returns to that city a couple of decades later—Philip was still based in the church there! (21.8). Peter Wagner wonders whether 10% of Christians might have evangelistic gifting<sup>1</sup>, and if this is anywhere near the truth, I think that the identification and releasing of these gifts and ministries of evangelism *within* the church will be one key to resourcing church planting as well as to restoring the missionary dynamic of the whole UK church! Certainly the secret of growth of the Icthus Fellowship church plants that I have described, seem to be that they have succeeded in this respect.<sup>1</sup> Their new congregations as a whole are powerful evangelizing units, expressing a life of witness at every level.

Reference has already been made to the fact that some missionaries and church leaders see church planting as *the* most effective form of evangelism. I believe that it also provides a key to understanding the full scope of evangelism. Let me explain. Church planters emphasize that when starting in a new area the first task is to look for those who are open to the gospel. A lot of time is not devoted at this stage to those who are unresponsive. This is not that they do not have a concern for the whole community, but that the first priority is quickly to enlarge the team with more workers. Then a second phase can begin of being salt and light to all sections of the neighbourhood. This highlights the fact that evangelism actually has two distinct aspects, *reaping* and *sowing* (see prologue). Reaping will produce quick results whereas sowing is costly in terms of service and sacrifice, while also requiring patience to wait for a subsequent season of harvesting. Some churches go on reaping over a wider and wider area and tend to avoid the challenge of sowing—other churches make a virtue of sowing and never reap. Planting satellites around a parent that has reaped over a wide area will be especially hard, since patient sowing will be the only option for those pioneering the new work.

As the pattern of satellite congregations develops in this country, we may be able to learn lessons from abroad. In many areas they have found

<sup>1</sup> Peter Wagner, *How to Grow Your Church*, (Regal Books, 1976) pp.76-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Church Planting, op. cit.*, pp.8-9.

that if the pioneer evangelist/church planter (missionary) moves on to a new plant, then the work he leaves behind almost invariably sags. Also if only daughter congregations are multiplied in a cluster around the parent, then growth is limited. They have discovered a whole new dynamic of 'extension growth' as the pioneer (missionary) stays at the parent base and trains up pioneers in the daughter congregations who then in turn plant 'grand-daughter' and so on. This liberates the model to unlimited growth and frees it from dependence on the original pioneer/parent.<sup>1</sup> Let's not let the process of church reproduction stop at the first generation, but plan for self-replicating units.

**Ministry Training** patterns are inevitably challenged by current church planting developments. David Gillett, the principal of Trinity College, Bristol, in his address to the third annual conference on Church Planting in the Church of England, accepted and developed several of these challenges.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, he considered that both ACCM selection and theological college training were orientated almost exclusively to the Pastor%Teaching ministry. They did not generally recognize, or offer training for, the Apostle:Evangelist who is so strategic for church planting. Ephesians 4.11-16 clearly shows that both are essential to the establishing of a healthy and mature Body of Christ. He further observed that the evangelist church planter need not automatically be an ordained minister. He graciously suggested that theological colleges might be in a weak position to offer this sort of training due to lack of experience or preparation. He concluded that they need to learn from the grass roots of the church planting movement and would welcome teams to come and share their experience with colleges. He also recognized that Spurgeons College was leading the way in this area since they have just established a parallel three year training programme for church planters alongside pastoral ministries.

The Baptists have also recently set up the 'Oasis Project' aimed at recruiting and training teams to help in church planting/renewal—especially in urban areas. These Oasis Teams are also working with other denominations. This project corresponds closely with our own programme that has just started to train teams for church planting/renewal. The training centre in St. Helens is run with YWAM and the practical ministry experience is gained with Holy Trinity and other local churches in the town with church planting philosophies. The first group of students produced three teams starting in September 1989 (two going to UPA parishes in London and Toxteth and one planting on new housing estates in the Midlands). I have also referred to the excellent Icthus Fellowship scheme for what they call 'networker' training which is open to those from other churches. These examples illustrate that a range of initiatives is arising to provide practically-based training in church planting with an ecumenical dimension. I think that church leaders need to get a vision for the potential of these programmes and actively to encourage and call some of their people to these challenging opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> George Patterson was one modern founder of this model and has written *Church Planting, through obedience-orientated Education* (P.O. Box 1002, Cucamonga, CA 911730 USA). A similar concept is also set out in *The Church Planters Guide* (SEAN, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Conference 19.5.89, Tapes and transcripts available from the author.

<sup>3</sup> Further details of all these training programmes available from author.

## 6. DISCERNING WAYS AHEAD (OR PIPE-DREAMING?)

Statistics that I presented a year ago indicated that we were moving towards a situation of one new Anglican church-plant per month. New information up to May '89 has now confirmed 12 plants in 1987 and 13 in 1988 and we are continually receiving news of new initiatives planned. So, as we conclude this short review, let's see what sort of shape may be emerging and I would like to suggest some ways ahead for the future. Even if realism would accept that institutional inflexibility is almost a given and the parish boundary unlikely to become more friendly overnight, I still see a number of strategies within the current limitations. But to be visionary requires Faith and Hope and so I dare to expect that some more radical new developments will also be possible!

### 1. Make the most of opportunities already pioneered

I believe we have shown in the brief review in these two booklets that already under the Holy Spirit, many authentic new patterns of mission have been created. Now, like an advancing army that has just penetrated enemy defences—efforts will be concentrated on taking maximum advantage of these bridge-heads and pouring resources through. Later, a consolidating operation will no doubt follow.

(a) We should see many more church planting projects within and across parish boundaries. These should multiply all the types of church planting models that I have described and analysed in these booklets. As the number of these plantings increase we must seek to make widely known, since such fruitful authentic new missionary initiatives are the best catalyst for change as well as furthering the churches' task.

(b) Aspiring church planters who have caught the vision, sense the calling and have the patience to work it out in leadership within the Church of England, should seek to get licensed for ordained or Church Army ministry. I see nothing wrong in encouraging talented and committed laity to seek training for licensed ministry motivated exclusively by this vision. Once trained and licensed, they can look for appointments to parishes where the population is high and thus plenty of opportunities exist for plants in different geographic or cultural/ethnic sub-units. Ideally the existing church should be showing signs of dynamic growth capable of resourcing teams to plant into these areas. The stage is then set for training teams and developing structures to multiply cells and congregations.

(c) Here I sound a warning note. Just as the Church Growth Movement has identified that a physical constraint on the growth of a congregation due to the size of a building will start to suppress growth at around 80% capacity—so, I believe, we shall see the same principle operating as satellites grow and multiply within a parish until the boundary becomes the limitation. A healthy church that is constantly producing new members will sooner or later need to produce new congregations and this process will not suddenly stop when the parish area has been effectively covered. I wonder, for example, how many more congregations can be planted in Chester-le-Street before the boundary becomes a constraint (or has this already been reached at seven satellites?). We should then be careful not to interpret stagnation and even some regression as a sign of

## DISCERNING WAYS AHEAD (OR PIPE-DREAMING?)

the inherent failure of church planting evangelism itself—but recognize that the missionary dynamic that was liberated to initiate the first satellite, still needs scope for further development. This is merely a challenge to further creativity at the next level as opportunities are sought for church planting in neighbouring areas or through seed teams.

(d) We should look for every opportunity to spread this vision in churches up and down the land—especially those that are brimming with lay leadership well beyond what they are able to fully release within a single congregation. The leaders of such churches can be challenged not only to church planting initiatives within and around their parish, but also to identify those with giftings for mobile seed teams whom they should then encourage and support in finding their place in such teams. I believe that God would say 'Let My People Go!' to spread the light and life in so many needy areas up and down the country.

(e) Also, wealthy churches must begin to put their hands in their pockets to support this sort of radical *home* mission. For too long 'mission giving' has meant overseas. The twinning of suburban/urban churches can enrich both by the sharing of resources, short-term exchange visits and giving of church planting team members.

### 2. Changes in existing Ministry Training

As we have said, this vision also needs sharing with our theological colleges and Church Army Training College—to both staff and students. If we can get these methods promoted to ordinands/trainee lay-workers and Church Army students, then many can be 'converted' just as they are about to come off the production line and into the mission field!

### 3. Pioneer Further Variations and New Application

I trust that the creative spirit and inventive dynamic that has thrown up all the present initiatives will continue to extend the rich variety of models. We also need to be ready to learn all we can from church planting experience abroad and from other denominations and groups such as Ichthus Fellowship in London. Appendix 3 has a list of guidelines prepared by Lewis Misselbrook who has many years of church planting experience with the Baptists, both abroad and in the UK. I hope that the availability of these booklets, with information about all that is already happening, will stimulate further ideas. Our own vision is to see new applications of these models through the following channels:

(a) Now that we have diocesan bishops who take this movement seriously and are enthusiastic about the potential, I hope that we can work out ways with them of increasing the opportunities for church planting within their diocese. There may be situations under their authority where a cross-border plant can be facilitated. There may also be pioneer mission opportunities which they can identify within their diocese, either represented by an entire parish or an area within one. These may involve teams from neighbouring parishes or seed teams/communities from further away. In this way I can foresee a wonderful opening up of the 'field' for church planting in certain parts of the country (and our sympathetic suffragan bishops and archdeacons may be able to play a part here too).

(b) If we are to service an increasing number of planting opportunities, then we need not only to recruit team members from strong churches but we should also see this as an opportunity to draw from the vitality of mission/para-church organisations. Support and partnership with agencies like CPAS and CMS—home mission section, could provide significant impetus to these developments. Also missions such as YWAM/Operation Mobilisation (OM)/Youth for Christ (BYFC) have tapped into the fact that the present 'young generation' are overflowing with enthusiastic commitment and not afraid of costly sacrifice. With their partnership in recruiting for teams, we can see this dynamic mission resource fed back into the local church even more effectively.

(c) Training bases will also be needed to train lay team members in church planting evangelism. We have already referred to the Baptist Oasis project, our programme with YWAM and the Icthus Fellowship training. Alongside these training programmes, it will be vital to establish supporting networks of communication. These will be aimed at linking up teams either with bishops who are prepared to authorize them to go and work in 'dormant' churches or unchurched estates/groups; or with parish incumbents ready to receive such a team to assist them in pioneer plants or to work within specific areas; or to function in an ecumenical project.

If these plans bear fruit, I can envisage very far-reaching consequences. We could see a whole new order of ministry arise in the area of mobile, self-supporting, 'trained lay-evangelists'. It may also not be expecting too much to foresee that such training programmes which are short-term, modular, practically based and ministry-related, may help to increase momentum for change in this direction for all theological training!

#### **4. Hopes for Medium-term Changes in the whole Mission Environment**

From the developments outlined, we might hope to see a gathering movement to assist the gradual process of shifting the Church of England from a maintenance mode towards mission.<sup>1</sup> In this environment church planting could become widely accepted and misunderstanding and mistrust could be minimised. As well as more modern and varied patterns of training, new orders of lay evangelist and church planters, we could also hope for a more flexible parish boundary system which would respond to mission initiatives and mission audit and become the servant of mission as well as pastoral care. We may also see many more Non-Stipendiary Ministers (N.S.M.'s) and not just as 'spare time' local assistants to redress the decline in stipendiaries but also as self-supporting career missionaries with even more flexibility of location than the stipendiaries. (Halleluia! Do I hear from St. Roland Allen?).<sup>2</sup>

A contribution towards this vision may be to find ways of supporting the bishops who are committing themselves to working with this movement. We shall depend heavily on their being able to share positively in the councils and committees of the church where others can be informed and attitudes softened. There is also a vital contribution to be made in this area by other sympathetic leaders such as archdeacons and Synod members who are prepared to labour in the unglamorous and sacrificial task of involvement in the structures and committees at all levels.

<sup>1</sup> See also David Holloway, *Ready Steady Grow* (Kingsway, 1989) esp. Ch.8 & 9

<sup>2</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St Paul's or Ours?* (World Dominion, 1912) so early this century he saw the need for 'non-professional' missionaries.

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

I hope that all that we have explored here has presented a picture of a type of evangelism that is effective and relevant. I believe it represents an exciting 'battle plan' to see the mission campaign for this country turned around from a mixture of disordered withdrawal and strategic retreat into a concerted push forward! However, Michael Griffiths has rightly warned (*op. cit.* p.124) that the church has a capacity to develop *natural immunity* to every new movement that would challenge and stimulate—doing it by accepting the jargon and slogans of the new insight or movement, forming committees to discuss them and speaking enthusiastically about them in sermons and conferences—**BUT GOING ON IN THE SAME OLD WAY**. This same caution not to underestimate the ability of institutions to produce an automatic 'rejection reaction' to any significant challenge to change, has already been highlighted in the discussion in Section 4, page 22.

On the other hand, we need to recognise that if church planting is to be an ongoing movement enriching the church, then it too needs to be open to criticism and suggestion so that it can progressively re-adjust and respond to its calling within the whole life of God's people.

## APPENDIX 1: DIOCESAN PROMPTING

Issued by the Mission Group (formerly the Diocesan Board for Mission and Unity) Southwell Diocese, January 1989

### CHURCH PLANTING

Recently there has been considerable interest in 'planting' a new congregation in community buildings, schools etc., and a number of churches in the Diocese have either done so or are thinking about it. Experience has shown that the following Guidelines should be considered:

1. There must be a real commitment by the parent church to support the project wholeheartedly, even though it may lead to some apparent loss to itself. This commitment may have financial implications.
2. A team is needed, not just an individual: teams seem to have varied from 3 to 50 in size.
3. The best church transplants are done by laypeople, with or without help from an ordained minister, but they must be accountable to someone.
4. The parent church must GIVE the members of the team to the new project as part of its outreach—not see them as only on loan. Nevertheless the connection with the parent church must be retained for personal as well as legal requirements. The team should be seen as missionaries sent out by the parent.
5. Worship should be at the same place each week wherever possible. It does not have to be on Sunday.
6. The prime responsibility is newcomers—not churchgoers who transfer because it is more convenient. Worship must be 'accessible'. Therefore there should be a query as to whether the Eucharist is the right main service.
7. Adequate publicity must be given at all times.
8. There is a need to learn from other churches who have undergone the same process and from the national scene. The Diocesan Adviser in Evangelism can help.
9. Ecumenical involvement should be assumed from the start wherever possible. However it is unwise to formalize an LEP until the enterprise has become well established.
10. Grow new Christians not new organizations.
11. No buildings should be built unless it is absolutely inescapable.
12. Pray at all times.

## APPENDIX 2: CHURCH PLANTING— SOME RELEVANT QUESTIONS

(Paul Perkin of HTB January 1989)

1. What is the vision? Why do you want to plant?
2. Who will lead the plant? What vision is there for developing a Staff Team?
3. How are you going to publicize the vision?
4. How are you going to appeal to people to transfer? And when?
5. How will you monitor those who do come? What type of people are you looking for? How many? Are there restrictions on any individuals? What commitment are you looking for, and for how long initially?
6. What principles will you give people on which to arrive at a decision? e.g.—Geography—Friends of others who are going—Relationship with leader —A ministry unfulfilled in the parent church—Prompting of Holy Spirit
7. What will be the commitment of the Sending Church?
8. How will you ensure you don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg?
9. What Ministries/Leaders are you going to look for to set the plant going? eg Small Group Leaders, Worship Leaders, Welcomers, Beginner's Group Leaders, wealthy backers.
10. How are you providing for people who do not come to be able to give continuing support, in prayer and finance?
11. What sort of commissioning/send-off? When? A sudden jump or a gradual transfer?
12. What degree of autonomy will the plant have?
13. What continuing links will there be with the parent? e.g. celebrations, teaching seminars, staff meetings.
14. What relationship do you hope to put in place with the hierarchy? What conditions/support are you looking for from Bishop, Diocese, Archdeacon, Rural Dean? (NB the small group always has less clout and is more vulnerable)
15. What relationship will the plant have with other churches in its area, and also with the community and society?
16. All the questions about the physical plant:—Does it need 4 millions spent on it?—Does it have a debt?—Is it adaptable for your purposes/ministry?—What do you want to do to it? Short term and long term?
17. What distinctive ministry will the plant have? Same as the parent or different? eg more informal/younger/more families?—different geographical area—different social outreach.
18. Will the plant in due course be able to plant?

### **APPENDIX 3: PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH PLANTING**

**(from Lewis Misselbrook)**

1. Everything to be centred in the Living Christ, his Spirit and his purposes. No packaged strategy. No building a mini-Mother Church. No dependence on the missionary. No institutionalism.

2. Do your homework carefully about when and where to plant. Area Survey. Natural catchment (without 'barriers') of about 10,000 people near. What kind of people? What other churches?

Suitable pioneer (or better a pioneer team) to go in first. Must be gifted and experienced. What the team is the church will tend to be.

3. Direct and relevant evangelism of basics of love, prayer and personal contact, sharing Jesus. The first three years are those of greatest opportunity. Door-by-door visiting and house-groups are valuable (cf. 'Good News Down the Street' by M. Wooderson).

4. Pioneer(s) must live in the area and learn to speak and think in the language and thought forms of the area.

5. The aim is to build an indigenous church, which both represents and communicates to the area. Pioneers must make people free to make their own decisions on the basis of scripture and prayer in fellowship and in terms of their own culture.

6. Go straight for adults—especially families. Do not 'begin with the children'. Make each Christian home a mission outpost for its street. Help parents teach Christ to their own children. If a lady comes to worship without her husband, send a loving couple to visit both.

7. Use small sharing groups to build disciples. The group leader is not to teach but to encourage all to share on two points: (a) what does this passage of the Bible say? (b) how can we apply it to our lives? No philosophic discussion.

8. Build in, from the beginning, shared, clear goals and objectives with regular re-evaluation. One aim is that the Church now in building shall be self-governing under God, self-supporting and self-propagating.

9. Choose leaders carefully as gifts and skills show. Train every one of them. Learn how to discover gifts and delegate. Ensure the aim of the leadership is to help the whole membership to grow (Ephesians 4.11-12).

10. Ensure that decisions are crux-decisions. Friends, relatives, neighbours invited by card to baptism and reception afterwards and testimonies. Where one door is open, others will be ajar.

11. Be involved in the community in Jesus' Name, but do not make the community dependent on your service. Make your building serve people and mission.