

# Hassles & Glory



**An unvarnished account  
of God's envisioning  
of a rural congregation**

**Michael Lumgair**

## **CONTENTS**

Preface

Prologue

Chapter 1	TEN YEARS ON
Chapter 2	DISCOVERING MY ROOTS
Chapter 3	CALLED INTO MINISTRY
Chapter 4	THE VILLAGE CHURCH (1980)
Chapter 5	UPROOTING THE CHURCH (1980-82)
Chapter 6	PLANTING THE CHURCH (1983)
Chapter 7	BUILDING THE CHURCH (1984)
Chapter 8	RESTORING THE CHURCH (I) (1985-1986)
Chapter 9	RESTORING THE CHURCH (II) (1986-1987)
Chapter 10	OUTREACH IN THE CHURCH (1980-1990)
Chapter 11	STRATEGY & ORDER IN THE CHURCH
Chapter 12	FAMILY LIFE AND THE CHURCH
Chapter 13	THE LEARNING CHURCH

Epilogue

## **ADDITIONAL NOTE BY THE AUTHOR**

This manuscript was prepared for publication in February 1991  
but was never published.

The complete contents are now included in this pdf  
but the information has not yet been updated.

It may be that I will do this in due course and add a postscript.  
Since 1991 two ministers have followed me at St. Peter's Tollerton,  
and throughout the years since then

I have remained the Incumbent of St. Peter's Bexleyheath.  
Michael Lumgair  
10 August 2003

## **PREFACE**

This book began to be written as I neared the tenth anniversary of my incumbency at Tollerton. It seemed an appropriate time to look back with thanksgiving on all that God had done in the church and in our own lives and to see what lessons learned could valuably be passed on to others. It had been suggested to me by our Diocesan Director of Training, Canon Michael Austin, that I might like to consider preparing some background material with a view to writing some articles for publication.

Such preparation would serve as an exercise in theological reflection on my ten years in Tollerton, bringing my life and that of the church under the scrutiny of Scripture, and hopefully clarifying the way ahead, both for the church and for my own ministry.

The original plan was to describe my spiritual journey and the kind of person I was when I first came to Tollerton, what my wife and I discovered on our arrival, what we set out to do in leading the church, and what happened as a result. Then from our distilled wisdom we would share what principles we had learned that were worth passing on for the benefit of the wider Christian community.

The articles have yet to be written. These chapters have. I had in mind writing something about restoration values in a village community, and to show that what can successfully happen in the cities and suburbia can happen in the rurals, too. And that where our expectations are high, and we seek to restore biblical values to the life and ministry of the local church, even in rural communities we can realise significant results. Faith in the countryside is more than possible.

No church is without its problems, and we have seen our fair share of these. On certain days I've been tempted to chuck it all in and try my hand at becoming a piano tuner instead!

But the call of God (and sometimes the comfort of our Rectory home) has kept us going. And, as my wife suggests in the Prologue, we have seen amazing things happen (beyond many people's expectations in a parish like ours) and we give God all the glory. If the things we have learned can help another church press on further into restoration in the power of the Spirit, we shall be delighted.

Michael Lumgair.  
February 1991.

## **PROLOGUE**

**by Christine Lumgair**

A Monday morning in May. The time was 8. 44 am as I snuggled down into the comparative comfort of our caravan bed. Our four boys were all asleep. Peace reigned. As I dosed into a longed for sleep, my mind drifted over the events of the previous twelve hours.

We had decided to take an early holiday for in the previous year we had had very little break due to the arrival of our fourth son, James. We had also been bogged down with some rather difficult and painful pastoral problems. So naturally three whole weeks away in the far north of Scotland was a great draw and turned out to be quite an oasis.

On the evening before, our CYFA group teenagers had been round for their usual after church meeting. Michael led them in a Bible Study while I continued to pack up our faithful old caravan ready for intended takeoff early on the Monday morning. The children were too excited to settle down, so the older ones came to help me. The evening was pleasant, and the teenagers finished their meeting in the garden, being entertained by our lively lads. Michael joined me in the packing up and, to my surprise, we were actually organised to leave by 9.20 pm that very evening. So why wait a moment longer when we could be heading up the inviting MI?

All boys safely belted up, we sped northwards, leaving Tollerton, the church and all the problems well behind us. In our hurry we had left behind one or two vital things, such as the freezer blocks, which were still in the kitchen freezer instead of keeping the cheese together in the cool box. Even that seemed trivial as we passed by Wetherby, Scotch Corner, Durham, through the Tyne Tunnel, past Alnwick, the twinkling lights of Lindesfarne, on towards Berwick and stopping in Edinburgh at 3 am for petrol.

Michael decided to give us a quick tour of the city and show us his old school, Fettes College. After the boys had seen the grandeur of their father's school, we headed over the Forth. Sleep overcame me and the next memory was waking up to find us touring another city, this time Perth, not to visit another school but to find our bearings, having lost our way. Next moment we were up in the highlands. Dawn began to break. The mists were shimmering on the lakes, giving their own ephemeral beauty and mystery. We were in Scotland at the beginning of a wonderful holiday. Our first stop was on the shores of Loch Lockie and we were not disappointed with our expectations. We all drifted into a peaceful sleep.

Two years later we looked forward to heading north again for another holiday. Michael wanted to go to Edinburgh and do some more research on his family tree, But on the way we thought we would stop at some of those places we had rushed past on our last visit to Scotland. This time we spent ten days exploring Northumbria. The miles of golden beaches, the castles, the Cheviots and the 'singing hinneys' all added to the particular beauty of that remote part of England that most people travel past and never see. This time we were surprised beyond our expectations.

Soon after our visit to Northumbria I was chatting to some of our church members. One was a new Christian, thrilled with new life in Jesus and excited by the warmth and fellowship of our church, St. Peter's Tollerton. She was amazed

at the number of people that just passed through our village to go to other larger churches in the city. Another young man said that for years he did not even know there was a church at Tollerton. I felt our holiday experience was a picture of our church. Tollerton is a village you drive through from Nottingham to Melton Mowbray or Leicester. The church is hidden behind trees in the old part of the village, so it is understandable that many who pass by are unaware of what goes on behind those trees. For unbeknown to them, there is an exciting church there, whose members reach out to the community with the love and power and challenge of Jesus. If they would just come and see, maybe, as I had discovered Northumbria, they would find themselves surprised beyond their expectations.

On March 18, 1990, Tollerton parish church received its first visit from the ninth Bishop of Southwell, the Right Rev Patrick Harris. That Sunday morning was both an evangelistic event and a thanksgiving for Michael's ten year ministry at Tollerton. The service was lively, with a mixture of strong evangelical hymns and Scriptural worship songs, accompanied by keyboard and drums, hand raising and clapping. There was a drama and an interviewed testimony. And Bishop Patrick gave a very clear gospel message which touched many present.

As I sat at the side, I looked around and saw the church comfortably full with a good number of people who ten years earlier would never have been seen in a church, let alone raising their hands in worship to the living God. Alongside them were friends, family, husbands that they had brought along, not just to hear the Bishop, but to hear from him the good news that they had themselves received.

My mind also went back to those who had come to faith through the ministry at St Peter's over recent years but had moved away to other parts of the country. I saw some present who had once opposed Michael's ministry but were now beginning to turn slowly towards what God was doing among us. Then my mind went outside those four walls to the village community. Some had felt Michael's entry into their peaceful village had turned their world upside-down (not a bad precedent) and Tollerton had never quite been the same since.

The church was now ever looking for ways to reach out to the community with the love of Jesus. In the previous ten years, apart from Michael's visiting, every house had been visited by the Church at least five times, including invitations to hear Billy Graham, the Diocesan Centenary distribution of Luke's Gospels, and the free offer of Cephas, our quarterly broadsheet. These in themselves gave opportunity to give help in any practical ways to those whose needs had been revealed. There was also Lunch Bunch, which provided a haven for young mums in the midst of pressures of young children. Those in the church were making every effort to befriend neighbours. Personally I had made many friends. Some had started coming to church, others were happy to come for coffee or attend Lunch Bunch. With our four children of varying ages, relationships were easy to make and life was good.

As I sat in church that morning I had no reason to feel complacent, for there was still much to do in this church and community, but I did feel a contentment that comes from knowing that God had used us, even though at times we were inadequate, weak, hurt and thought by some to be insensitive. Still, through God's gracious hand much had been done.

I did not always feel contentment here at Tollerton. The first few years were an unfolding of discouragements and disappointments. Some thoughts that I jotted down during that period show my feelings in those days.

#### **LIFE AFTER DEATH - A CERTAINTY**

When everything is going well  
And we are surrounded  
By people who love You

This moment of darkness  
This place of wilderness  
This atmosphere of oppression  
Will be far away.  
But  
Let me just encase it for a moment  
While it is a meaningful reality.  
Although dark,  
In faith the light of life is clear  
Revealing direction through his mighty word.  
Although we see  
An ugly, barren wilderness  
Even there  
The beauty of an inquiring heart  
Seeking truth is seen  
Like one delicately coloured flower  
Against a stark and colourless desert.  
Although oppression  
With its many facets  
Bogs us down and stifles our breath  
Yet  
Like a mighty wind moving its course  
Across the earth  
And forbidding any stubborn heavy cloud  
To stand in its way,  
So the Spirit of Praise  
Expels those very elements  
That would turn us  
From a Great God  
To our own self-indulgence.

And so we would praise You  
Our mighty and everlasting God  
For You said  
    "For My sake  
        You will be brought to trial  
        Family will turn against you  
        You will be hated....

They hated me  
And called me Beelzebul  
So don't be afraid of people  
People who even try and hurt you.  
Rather be afraid of God  
Who can destroy body and soul in Hell.  
Again, don't be afraid.  
Not one sparrow falls to the ground  
Without your Father's consent  
And you are worth  
More than many sparrows."

The darkness  
The wilderness  
The oppression

All part of the Plan of an all-loving God.  
These times in which we wish to escape  
Are just fleeting moments in eternity  
In which our Lord  
Can give us a taste of His  
Hurts, and loneliness and ridicule  
Yes, and even correction from His disciples.

An unjust trial  
And Death.  
These He went through  
In order to bring us  
Into the joy of the Father's presence.  
The resurrection was not  
Far from Good Friday.  
But Saturday was dark  
Oh, so dark.  
Yet Sunday did come  
With hope and joy.  
For out of death came life.

And so with a vision of hope  
We look to the morning  
Knowing that true life  
Only comes through real death.

Throughout it all I knew the truth voiced by Paul<sup>1</sup>: *"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."* Through many of the hurts and difficulties of those early years I knew God would never let me go beyond that with which I could not cope, an experience expressed frequently by the Psalmist. In the midst of his troubles, David could say<sup>2</sup>: *This I know: God is for me... I walk with God in the light of the living. As for God his way is perfect... He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.*

However much I remembered those words and however much I knew the truth of God's sovereignty, there were times when I felt like passing through Tollerton and far out the other end. But how glad I am we stayed on to see the evident fruit of our labours in the Lord, fruit we trust will last.

Christine Lumgair.

#### NOTES:

1. 2 Corinthians 4,
2. Psalm 56; Psalm 18.

## CHAPTER ONE

### TEN YEARS ON

The church is not buildings but people, a new and variegated Christian community, a diverse people from a wide range of colourful backgrounds and of all ages who have met with Christ, embraced the gospel and found themselves Joint members of the family of God and of the body of Christ. Baptised by the Spirit into his body, they are being built together in the Lord to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Under Christ's direction the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. Such a church, consisting of those who have been brought together through faith in Christ to be one people, is so central to the gospel and so important in the purposes of God that the Bible tells us it is God's intent that the multicoloured wisdom of God's plan being worked out through the church should be made known even to the cosmic powers.

It is only natural that one should look at the local church and see what is being accomplished through it and how much it reflects the Biblical pattern. From time to time clergy are required to undergo self-assessment in their ministry, to consider their strengths and weaknesses and to look for ways of achieving greater excellence in the future. I was encouraged to list up to five achievements in ministry over the last five years, and this was my list:

1. Established the local church upon firm foundations, where Christ is loved and honoured, the Bible is accepted as the authoritative Word of God in every aspect of the church's life (not least in finance), and the Holy Spirit is welcomed to inspire worship, impart gifts and cultivate holiness.
2. Enabled the fellowship to become confident in sharing the faith, and better able to reach out in love to the local community, and beyond, with evangelism a top priority.
3. Developed leadership in every section of the church's life which is wholeheartedly committed to Christ, and united in heart and mind to fulfil the vision God has given them; and owning a clear strategic plan, regularly revised.
4. Ensured that prayer is at the heart of everything that is done (e.g. prayer cells, prayer triplets, prayer within committees, regular whole nights of prayer, prayer counselling, house groups etc. ), with a prayer co-ordinator to encourage this.
- 5, Encouraged the renovating and rebuilding of old outbuildings (at considerable expense, entirely paid for in advance by the congregation) to become a lively and attractive Church Centre used mainly for ongoing children's and young people's work, evangelistic and social gatherings, mum's and toddler's group and community play group, and fellowship meetings.

It must be left to others to judge how pretentious my claims were, but it is my belief that whether through me or in spite of me, such things have come into being during my years in Tollerton. Future chapters will depict the struggles and heartache that effected these results, but results there have been that redound



greatly to the glory of God, and speak powerfully to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

Over ten years ago a well-known evangelist friend encouraged me with these words: "Everything of lasting value in the Christian ministry begins in a small way and that is why the Lord said at the rebuilding of the nation after the exile that those who had returned to rebuild were 'not to despise the day of small things'. I have observed that it is so often out of a very little flickering fire that God begins a work which is lasting and eternal. " Whilst this is undoubted true, I have sensed that many clergy are content to remain in the day of small things. How frequently you hear comments such as the following from the lips of a local clergyman's wife (recounted in Curate's Egg) "In the countryside, if you can move the churches on an inch or two, you've achieved a lot." It is my conviction that they could be moved on much further than that.

Many settle for much less than might happen if only greater risks were taken to live out the word of God in our churches. On a recent sponsored cycle ride (in aid of the Notts. Historic Churches Trust) we had the opportunity to visit numerous village churches in the vicinity. In each were church folk on duty ready to clock us in. It became increasingly evident, in speaking with them, that few such folk were actively involved in the spiritual life of their church or able to testify to the grace of Christ in their lives. I thank God that, though we may still be a small village church, we have got beyond the day of small things. Almost everyone in our congregation could at a moment's notice give an account of their faith, and most of them have been called upon to do so, and sometimes to preach.

Many country churches go on year in, year out, rarely seeing anyone born again by the Spirit. We give thanks for dozens of conversions in our time here. Many churches struggle to find workers willing and able to run all the different groups. We also do but we rejoice in the deep and wholehearted commitment of our members, glad that our youngsters are being taught by those who know the Lord and are trained to teach others. Many churches struggle to keep going, financially and in other ways. We have seen a body of people who give generously and will from time to time go out on teams to bring blessing to other churches and fellowships and even synods. Many churches have people in their congregation who need to go elsewhere for their spiritual tank-up. How good it is that this has not been necessary here. I say these things not because we are proud of what we have accomplished, for it is solely the Lord's doing, but to make the point that we need not settle for the status quo. We need not succumb to the expectations of a settled community existence where nothing changes hardly at all, and we miss out on what God is doing in our generation.

We claim no success story, but we do affirm that God is working in his church today, restoring his church, preparing his people for the coming revival, and hastening the day of Christ's return. The Decade of Evangelism underlines the urgency of the gospel in reaching our generation for Christ. We cannot remain as we are, however slowly or however fast we have progressed so far. With every fibre of our being we must reach out with the love of Christ to a needy world, and that will mean adapting the way we do things to the way the Father does things. Change is here to stay. Or it should be, if we are to be where the action is, God's action by his Spirit.

As I look back on the past decade my heart is thrilled at what I have seen in the lives of those who have come to Christ, joined the church, and gone on to see his power at work in them in forgiveness, in healing, in deliverance, in the impartation of gifts, and in making them more like Christ and better able to do his works.

## **AN EYE HEALED**

I think of Jean, who heads up our Young Church, who recounted one of several instances of healing in her home, and who has since been used to minister healing to others.

"One of the worst nights of my whole life was spent one Friday when my family and I were camping on the paddock at the beginning of a camping weekend which we were organising. I spent the whole night awake with excruciating pain in my right eye from which I could get no relief at all. By Saturday morning I could barely open my eye and yet it was intensely painful when closed. I was taken to Keyworth Health centre where I was told that I had an abrasion on the surface of my eye causing all the pain. I needed pain killers, eye drops, might need to go to the Queen's Medical Centre and was certainly told not to continue camping that weekend. I went home, took a pain killer, and then rang the Rectory to ask for prayer.

"Three friends from the fellowship came over immediately to lay hands on me and pray. They prayed specifically for the pain to be removed and then for the eye to be healed. I felt very confident at the time that God would do this, and was able to rejoice. I took no more pain killers that day, by the middle of the afternoon I was back on the campsite - no eye-patch, no need for eye drops, no pain, not even any further discomfort.

"I have no doubts that the Lord answered those prayers that morning and greatly accelerated that healing process so that I was able to participate in and enjoy the rest of that camping weekend. Praise His name!"

## **AWAY WITH FEAR**

I think of Glyn, for some years one of our worship leaders, who used to make frequent trips to the Middle East, He was terrified of flying, and could never resist the mental picture of his position as viewed from outside the aircraft. "My mind was troubled, breathing difficult, window cover closed and every hour passed like six!" But, on a later trip, as a result of the prayer of our fellowship, even without his prior knowledge, "such was the power generated that on entering the plane I felt at ease and comfortable with just a faint anxiety - very different from previous occasions." Following his conversion, he opened his feelings to God in prayer and to members of the fellowship, and during his next trip he was "untroubled and at peace throughout the flight. Thanks be to God!" His obsessive fear had been totally removed.

I think also of Ian, a young lad upon whom the occult began to have a terrifying hold, "I remember reading one evening about ghosts and as a result I could not sleep. I kept on seeing this horrific face." After a Billy Graham mission, he asked Jesus to forgive his sins and come into his life. Satan's power over him was broken.

## **A NEW LANGUAGE**

It was at an ordinary service of Holy Communion that I invited those who wanted to receive the release of the baptism of the Spirit to stay up at the rail after receiving their communion. No-one in fact stayed, so I renewed my invitation. One lady came up and knelt at the rail, and almost before I could lay hands on her, she was released, and from her lips poured forth a heavenly language. This

was not the first release in her life, for some years before she had come to Tollerton she completely broke her addiction to smoking as a result of praying one night: "Lord, you know I can't give up smoking by my own will. If it is your will that I don't maltreat my body, then let your will be done; but you'll have to take this urge to smoke away from me completely because I've tried for fourteen years and I can't do it on my own." It was Margaret's testimony that she hadn't wanted a cigarette since that night. Wow!

### **BURDENS LIFTED**

I remember attending a meeting of local clergy one morning where, in our bible discussion, doubts were aired as to whether we could expect signs and wonders and dramatic deliverance in our own day. I had arrived late at the gathering, having come straight from a ministry group which had been praying for one of our members who was beset by a spirit of anxiety arising from some previous understandably upsetting experience in her life. As we prayed for her deliverance in Jesus' name, her body first began to shake uncontrollably, before she entered into a deep peace, and from that day there was an undeniable change. The Lord had dramatically set her free to entrust him with her future and that of her family. As I shared with the Chapter what had happened, and recounted some of the other things that had been happening in our church at that time, the passage we were studying began to take on a contemporary relevance hitherto unknown. Time and again since, we have seen others (young and old) who have been released from burdens through prayer counselling, burdens that effected their health and hindered their spiritual growth until they were lifted.

### **GOOD NEWS**

Dramatic healings are marvellous to behold; seeing people being set free through repentance, renunciation and prayer, from fear, anxiety, anger, rebellion, and things to do with the occult, have brought many great joy; witnessing members of the fellowship being filled with the Spirit and exercising spiritual gifts has been thrilling. But nothing brings greater joy (in heaven or on earth) than to see people coming to Christ and receiving forgiveness and eternal life and the gift of the Spirit.

When Bishop Patrick Harris came to Tollerton to mark my tenth anniversary as Rector in March 1990, a young couple, Simon and Dianne, were interviewed about how they had come to faith. Various factors had played a part in this: the warm friendship they had found at the church, their study of Mark's Gospel when a Good News team visited their home, the Billy Graham Mission '89 meetings and the Discovery Group they afterwards attended. And since their coming to Christ the Parish Commitment Course had been invaluable in helping them sort out their new life of submission to Christ. So many in the fellowship had been praying for them, and what rejoicing there had been when the news of their salvation was first announced. Many of us were deeply moved by their testimony in church.

I was thrilled at the time that such an interview was possible, for we had been going through a bit of a lull in seeing people coming to the Lord. I hoped that as a result of the clear gospel presentation by the Bishop that morning, others might be disposed towards having a Good News team in their home. Nothing happened for a while, but following another invitation service God spoke powerfully to another couple, just arrived in the parish, and in no time Kevin and Debbie welcomed a Good News team into their home, and at the time of writing both are following Jesus and have embarked on our Commitment Course.

So God continues to do good things in our midst, making known his multicoloured wisdom through the church which he has brought into being by the power that raised Christ from the dead. For all these recollections have been of people who were not simply touched by God in a personal way. Those being saved were added to the church. And through them the church has been touched by God in its worship and ministry. And through the church the word has gone out <not just to the cosmic powers but to the local community) about what God has done among us, and what God can do for those who are still outside.

We all too easily forget that we were once outside, ourselves, having no hope and without any personal knowledge of God, knowing nothing of what it means to really belong to the family of God and to the body of Christ. The next chapter is the story of how I slowly discovered the way in.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DISCOVERING MY ROOTS

It has often been said that Christian commitment involves giving as much as I know of myself to as much as I know of Christ. So, if our discipleship is to remain authentic, it must necessarily become a developing and a deepening commitment, as we grow in our self-knowledge and in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The older people get, the more they tend to harp on the past, but it is no bad thing even in our middle years to go back to our roots, to reflect upon the influences and experiences that have shaped our lives, which inevitably colour our approach to present day challenges. A greater awareness of who we are in the providence and purposes of God ought to lead us to a renewed commitment to the God who has brought us to this point in our spiritual pilgrimage.

### ANCESTRAL ROOTS

It so happens that I have for a long time had an interest in genealogy, having as I do a long and fascinating Scottish ancestry. Our second son Simeon's third name, Ranulph, goes back to an early ancestor in the Lumgair family, Ranulphus le Falconer de Lunkyr (1211), And we often make pilgrimage to that part of Scotland where can still be found a Lumgair loch, law, burn and farm. Alas, there is no castle. Our first son John's third name, Falconer, reminds us of our uncontested claim to the peerage of that name, at present in abeyance, which could one day seat him in the House of Lords. Although I was neither born in Scotland, nor did we ever have our home in Scotland, I was educated in Edinburgh, sported a kilt with the tartan of Ancient Campbell of Cawdor, and feel my roots are north of the border.

### GEOGRAPHICAL ROOTS

And yet I have no real roots, Born in Devon during the second world war in 1943 Into an upper middle-class, fairly privileged and well-to-do family, I spent my early childhood mainly in Korea and Japan, where my father was involved in the oil industry, assisted General MacArthur in relation to the Korean War, and was made an honorary Brigadier General. My memories of the Far East are few, for I am saddled with a very poor memory, but we visited many fascinating places, there and en route to the UK, including the romantic Raffles Hotel. I only wish I could remember them. My later childhood was spent mainly in Britain at preparatory and public schools far away from my family, with holiday respite either at one of our homes on Hayling Island (where we knew what it was to be flooded twice by the sea), or abroad in West Africa (Nigeria and Ghana) and North Africa (Libya), where my father was then based as a personnel manager with a major oil company.

And since leaving school, I have never been in the same place for long. A couple of terms teaching at an extraordinary cramming establishment in Hampshire, coaching boys for Common Entrance and 'O' levels, was an unforgettable experience and I can still remember the school song: The wise old owl watches over us, keeping his eye on our work. I left there for London, joining first the actuarial department of a mutual life assurance firm in the city (to think I used to travel from Stockwell to Bank wearing a bowler hat and carrying a brolly!), then (realising, wisely, I would probably never make the grade) spending three years in one of the big five banks in a local branch (my

first real face-to-face encounter with those who had not had a public school education) and at its overseas department, and all this time moving from digs to digs all over London (Stockwell, Swiss Cottage, Earl's Court, Hyde Park, Covent Garden, and South Kensington).

And I've been on the move ever since, as an ordinand in London and Cambridge, assistant curate in Hertfordshire, associate vicar in Sussex (where I first met my future wife), and curate in charge in Nottinghamshire, until my marriage to Chris in 1980, and my appointment as Rector in Tollerton the same year. Until then my travelling days as a child were repeated in adulthood, such that I had been to some 45 countries in the northern hemisphere. So although I have ancestral roots in Scotland, because I had never been in one place for long, nor had my parents, in practice I am geographically rootless. And to begin with I was also spiritually without roots. But something happened, as I shall recount, to enable me to be spiritually rooted in Christ and in his Church.

## **SPIRITUAL ROOTS**

At the beginning of 1980, speaking in one of the halls of residence in Nottingham University during a mission there, I shared how the three greatest needs of mankind transcendence, community and significance - are met in Jesus Christ. Transcendence has to do with our search for something or someone outside our personal experience and the need to come to terms with the face behind the universe, the One without whom our hearts are restless.

### **A) TRANSCENDENCE**

I think I was made aware of the otherness of God through going to church as a family and through daily chapel attendance at school. My father was a Presbyterian, my mother C of E, but both were nominal churchgoers, and we used to attend occasionally the local middle-of-the-road anglican church that showed little sign of life, and more often a small evangelical congregational chapel to which my mother was a generous benefactor. I remember enjoying the hearty singing and used to accompany the service on the harmonium from time to time. Chapel at Chafyn Grove Prep school on the outskirts of Salisbury made no discernible impact upon me other than just the one prayer that we must have said many a time, for I still remember it: "O Jesus Master Carpenter, who at the last through wood and nails purchased man's salvation; wield well thy tools within our lives, that we who come to thee rough hewn may by thy hand be fashioned to a truer beauty." Nor did attendance on Sundays at the local St. Mary's, a vast edifice that might have instilled a sense of God, have any impact either.

But it was in Edinburgh at Fettes College that I sensed the otherness of God, as also the remoteness of God. Whether it was the vastness of the buildings (many Americans would turn up thinking the college to be Edinburgh Castle), the formality of the worship, or, I suspect, the feeling that there I was, so small, so vulnerable, so unhappy, thousands of miles from my family, that when I looked up at the sky there just had to be a God out there who cared, something set me on the search for the living God.

Even to this day I recoil at the song so popular then: Che sera, sera, whatever will be, will be. I loathed the rigours of public school life; it all seemed so unfair. I could not believe in such a God of fate. There must be a way out. In due course I was given a Moffatt translation of the Bible by my mother (at my request) - was this an indication of intent to find out more? And yet a year or so later I began to toy with graphology, to my later distress, and much later

deliverance, which encouraged an uneasy acceptance of fate.

I remember convening an Atheist Society, membership of two, an intellectually long-haired elite, who questioned the very existence of God. But in reading Bertrand Russell's "Why I am not a Christian" I became certain of God's existence, and in hearing an exceptionally riveting, if rare, address by a preacher (Richard Gorrie on the staff of Scripture Union) in chapel on the reality of the Resurrection, I had a growing confidence that Jesus surely had been raised from the dead. It was about then that I was confirmed into the Presbyterian church. I do not believe it had any immediate impact on my life, I never got drawn into any Christian Union or 'Bash' camps<sup>1</sup> (of their existence I knew nothing then), but the Presbyterian contact later proved to be an important link in my coming to faith.

In the meantime my heart stayed restless, and other more urgent matters took a hold of my life: studying and swatting for A levels and professional exams, an interminable activity for many years, judging by my diary; and the pursuit of music. Music was my love at school, a marvellous escape from all I detested <team sports particularly>, and a way towards self-fulfilment and self-acceptance. Through playing music I could work through my emotions privately and in accompanying house prayers impress others publicly, through listening to music (specially Beethoven string quartets and Mahler's symphonies), singing in the choir (at school then later in the Royal Choral Society under Sir Malcolm Sargent) and engaging in musical composition I could enter another world <I took great pride in winning the first ever composition prize at school with my choral setting of 'Song of David'.> But deep down I longed for something or someone outside myself. Fulfilment could not come from within.

## B) COMMUNITY

The need for transcendence was matched by the need for community, for belonging, for friends. Having experienced the isolation felt at school, living miles from family and friends, coming to London brought it all back. The loneliness of living in digs in a vast metropolis and hardly knowing a soul. Travelling to work by tube in the rush hour, hemmed in by complete strangers. Surrounded by crowds even at church, for to church I did go, the Church of Scotland, yet I was utterly lonely. To be sure the people there were friendly enough, and the facilities for a young bachelor like myself were ideal: singing with the BBC chorus in the church choir, Sunday lunch in the hall, tea in the afternoon, before the evening service. You could spend the day there. And there was Scottish Dancing as well. Yet I cried out for real friendship. For even church attendance did nothing to alleviate my sense of aloneness and alienation.

Then one Sunday I found the answer, though I hardly realised it at the time. Someone approached me with the challenging question: Do you know Jesus Christ? Well, I had to admit I knew a lot about him, for I'd listened to many a sermon (or tried to), but no, I couldn't actually say that I knew Jesus as a friend. I was evidently curious, for Peter Herbertson invited me to meet some of his Christian friends who studied the Bible together at his flat. Odd, I thought, but I went along, knowing it was the sensible thing to do if I really wanted to make friends. But what staggered me was this: here were people of my own ilk, young business men and attractive young ladies, who exhibited a unique quality of life that made me envy them; here were people actually enjoying the Bible and speaking of one who was evidently their best friend, the very person I needed to know - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some weeks later, I was invited quite out of the blue to a dinner party at which

a local pastor (John Kidd by name) very clearly and persuasively shared the Good News of Jesus Christ, who, in his love, had dealt with our sin on the cross and now, risen from the dead, stands outside the door of our lives and knocks. If anyone hears my voice, says Jesus, and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. That night I made my response. In the quietness of my bedsit, I opened my Gideon New Testament and, simply and unemotionally, I welcomed the Lord into my life. The stranger who had died for me had become my friend. And his friendship is one I cherish to this day.

Two things struck me forcibly at the time. First, that I should still have in my hands a New Testament that had been given to me as a boy of eight when attending the Karuizawa Vacation Bible School way out in Japan. All those years had gone by since first receiving it, but when it really mattered, it was there to help me come to know the Lord.

Inside its back cover, as in the most recent of Gideon bibles, there was a special place to record your name and the date of your decision 'to receive and confess Christ as your personal Saviour.' There was something very definite and reassuring in being able to sign my name 'Michael' and to record the date 11/6/7/631. It is a Testament I shall always treasure. And, secondly, how much joy it must have brought my landlady, for it was only then that I realised that she was a member of the Christian Brethren, and unknown to me, had been quietly praying for my salvation. We owe far more than we realise to the prayers of others.

The Bible says, God sets the lonely in families. I soon found that my circle of caring friends widened considerably in the weeks that followed my new found relationship with Jesus. I gained tremendous strength and security from the fellowship of others who had recently been adopted into God's family. And I appreciated the personal care and nurture I received as a new Christian, and the clear biblical teaching that set my future on firm foundations. To be honest, there were still times when I felt lonesome, even in the company of others and certainly shy, but I discovered that in knowing Jesus I was never alone, nor ever could be. The God who had seemed remote and aloof had now come right into my life in the person of Jesus Christ and I had come right into a vibrant and supportive fellowship of fellow believers.

It so happened that my conversion, my turning to Christ, happened when many were away on holiday. So it was tremendous already to have accepted an invitation from Robin Sherlock at the dinner party to visit him the next day, and to be followed up, given a booklet on how to be sure I was a Christian, and prayed for. Shortly afterwards I was to share his flat, overlooking Moss Bros in Covent Garden, I also derived great benefit from the bible study group to which I had first been invited a month or so before. I was soon to discover that there was a whole network of such groups all over London under the auspices of the Steward's Trust, and in no time it seemed I was getting to know up to 400 different people.

The Steward's Trust had been set up in the 1950's by Michael Allison MP and other old Etonians in order to evangelise a particular class of people who had all known each other at school, university or in the business world, who tended to live in London during the week and move to the country during the weekend and who would not be attracted by the kind of activities organised by most churches in those days. By the mid sixties it was still very upper-crust, full of ex-debs and public school types, and although there were a few more lively evangelical churches beginning to emerge and relate to such people, the groups still served a very valuable purpose. Although in my case I was not away every weekend, and I made some attempt to get involved in church life, there was nothing quite like the Steward's Trust for fellowship and for outreach to those of our own kind.



Not only did these groups enable one to get to know more about Christian faith and living, they were also a great encouragement to those young in the faith, and the frequent (sometimes even weekly) open meetings with gifted guest speakers (like David MacInnes) made sure that sharing our faith with non-Christians stayed a high priority. The groups also were an invaluable training ground for Christian leadership, and were formative for my own future ministry.

Every month or so the Steward's Trust groups went off for the weekend to Ashburnham Place in Sussex, a recently acquired conference centre set in beautiful grounds, landscaped by Capability Brown, where we were treated to excellent training courses, run by John Bickersteth and others, inspiring and equipping us to be more effective witnesses and servants of the Lord in our daily lives. There we gained our confidence in Christ, enriched each other's lives in deepening Christian fellowship, and were challenged to use our minds and our imaginations for the cause of the gospel.

### C) SIGNIFICANCE

With my growing knowledge of Christ, and my increasing appreciation of Christian fellowship, came a fresh realisation of my significance in the sight of God and of his people. I knew from the night of my conversion that he loved me and had sent his Son to die for me, and that he had sent his Spirit into my heart to live in me. I found myself wanting to pray and to read my Bible and to be with other members of God's family. And I began to see that I really mattered to God, and that those in the fellowship valued me too. And I felt the call upon my life to evangelise.

Yet I also sensed both an increasing feeling of condemnation that my life was not all that it should be, and an ongoing struggle in sharing my faith with outsiders. From reading fragmentary accounts of how I felt at the time, perhaps I was a little too hard on myself, though holiness is something young people today could profitably pursue with greater determination. Two quotations stayed with me in those days. "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself." And a sentence in the flyleaf of a copy of the Imitation of Christ, given me by my father: "Keep a good conscience and thou shalt always have Joy." I sought high standards (as I had before my conversion) but often failed (and felt a failure at my work and in family relations) and instead of enjoying God's forgiveness tended to be downcast by Satan's condemnation, and this marred my credibility in witnessing.

It was becoming clear that I needed to experience more of the Spirit, who is both the Holy Spirit and the Spirit who empowers us to witness. And it was timely that nearly a year after receiving Christ into my life Robin Sherlock should introduce me to one of the earliest meetings of the Fountain Trust at Orange Street Chapel in June 1964. Afterwards he prayed for me, and I think I was expecting a powerful transformation to take place. It didn't, Instead it led to a quest lasting nearly a year when I sought after 'charismatic experience'. I went to a number of meetings and read not a few books, but the crunch came through meeting Edgar Trout, a humble man of God from Plymouth, now gone to glory, whom I heard on two different occasions. I first heard him at a meeting in our own flat, when he spoke for nearly four hours on 1 Corinthians 12-14 on the gifts of the Spirit. Some of those who heard him then met again to reflect on his teaching. Then he was invited back to speak in the London flat of Michael Alison MP on 21 June 1965. Here is Trout's own account of what happened,

which I came across the following year in a healing journal.

"I was asked to speak in a private house at a meeting where young people of certain noble families were present. They had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ in the last three years. I had never spoken to a gathering like this in my life, and I realised more than ever that one has to go under the anointing of the Holy Spirit in order to be strong in the Lord,

"I opened the word of God and began to speak, and one was conscious that the Lord himself was taking charge. One young man got up and spoke very hesitatingly; he could hardly make his words clear. He said he was finding an intellectual barrier and asked us to pray for him. I went over and laid hands on him; and, asking God to let his message into his heart, I commanded the barrier that was binding him to go, by the power of God.

"Shortly a wonderful smile came on that young man's face and I knew that God was at work. I felt the Lord telling me to go and pray for him again; so I went. He started to pray very quietly... then later he was praying very quickly, then he began to pray in a tongue. Then when he had finished, he told us how his jaw had been getting slowly locked, making it increasingly difficult to speak. He was instantaneously healed. "We had not laid hands on him for healing; we had not prayed for healing. We had prayed that his soul might be liberated from bondage, and the healing came with this liberation. God works in wonderful ways."

Well, God did work in wonderful ways, though my recollection of that evening was somewhat different! I arrived at the meeting in a confused frame of mind. For a whole year I had been struggling over 'baptism in the Spirit' and the biblical warrant for a second and subsequent experience distinct from conversion. I came longing for a personal experience' and release of God's power in my life on the one hand, and yet on the other I wanted to sort out the doctrine, even to act as devil's advocate, with arguments at the ready against 'Spirit baptism'. I found an enmity within me against the very man who was there to help me. I grew impatient that before we could ask any questions we had to hear him speak for three quarters of an hour. And I sensed a growing lack of confidence that he would be able to understand yet alone answer my questions. He'd be in for a rough time, I thought.

When question time eventually came, my own question hardly seemed appropriate, but with diffidence I said: "Of course I am fully aware that the Spirit is working in a magnificent way all over the world. I believe things are happening today. People are being filled with the Spirit and receiving spiritual gifts. And yet I find there seems to be this intellectual barrier. I honour the great evangelical leaders, like John Stott and Dick Lucas, whose preaching and writings raise serious question marks against Baptism in the Spirit. No matter how much I long to be baptised in the Spirit and receive spiritual gifts, it seems, in the very moment of asking, always in the back of my mind there's that intellectual barrier. I just don't know what to do." The speaker said he would bear my difficulty in mind when it came to the time of prayer.

Eventually he asked the assembled company if they wanted to receive any particular gifts or blessings. I remember my tummy rumbled in the silence. At that moment I didn't want anything, thank you, but silently I played safe. I prayed 'that I might know Christ and the power of his resurrection'. This was the key. Seeking Christ and not the gifts. I did not want the gifts at that moment. Or the physical sensations that sometimes accompanied, say, the gifts of

healings. I even sat in a comfortable chair in such a position that I could not possibly work anything up myself that might create a physical sensation like pins and needles. If God was to act, he would have to take all the initiative. Then came the most significant moment in my life since my coming to faith in Christ nearly two years before.

Edgar Trout, without my asking, came towards me, and laying his hands on me, commanded the removal of that intellectual barrier, rebuked the power of Satan, and prayed into me the gift of faith. He left me, and there was a time of quiet worship, turning our eyes upon Jesus. One or two commented how the Spirit was touching them. Then to my surprise (and I wasn't going to admit it to anyone) I felt a tingling sensation in my arms, and my upper palate. I felt joy and praise welling from my heart. I was suddenly desperate for release, lest I burst. Either side of me I could hear people praying for me in tongues. I found myself praying in tongues. And then came the laughter, which pervaded the assembly. And the (temporary) release of my lockjaw. It was a glorious moment. And totally undeserved. To God be the glory

I left the gathering that night as if I were walking on air. On returning to my flat, my bible opened at Jude 20: *Continue to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit*. It was a command I needed to hear again in later years. But in the ensuing weeks the experience of the Spirit made a marked difference to my life. It drew me closer to Christ and to a life of righteousness. I no longer felt condemned. It gave me a vivid awareness of my filial relationship with the Father. And it empowered me for witnessing in a way I had never known previously. Woe betide anyone who sat near me in the underground! God now had a hold upon my life that marked me out as his, and I began to find him leading me to new areas of service. That experience showed me that I mattered to God, had found significance in his sight, and that he had a special plan for my life,

#### NOTES:

1. These Easter and Summer camps for varsity and public school boys were first started by Eric Nash, affectionately known as 'Bash'. His influential ministry is described in *Bash A Study in Spiritual Power*, edited by John Eddison (Marshalls 1983).

## CHAPTER THREE

### **CALLED INTO MINISTRY**

Ten years previously, at a time of particular unhappiness at public school, I had had the escapist feeling that it would be rather nice one day to be a parson in some remote and picturesque village in the English countryside. Once I had come to know Christ and the joy of making him known in the context of the capital city, I remembered again that country church of my daydreams, and realised not for me the cosy life of a country parson. I had a gospel to proclaim. And where better to proclaim it than in the big city, where I lived and worked and had my being. So I saw it as my responsibility to glean all that I could from wherever I could so as to become more effective in serving Christ. The Holy Spirit had equipped me with power and motivation. But there was much to learn. And many opportunities to do so.

Someone scanning my diaries of the mid-sixties might conclude that my commitment to church had grasshopper tendencies. I was here, there and everywhere. Yet I would argue there was reason behind it all. There is little doubt that my prime allegiance in those days was to the Steward's Trust, in which I had come to faith, through which I had made many friends, and by which I had received much nurture. It was only natural that I should stay in it, not simply for my spiritual growth but also as a base to win others to the Lord. In due course we even had our own chaplain, an Anglican minister, paid for by the Trust, to train and equip us in Christian ministry. Occasionally we were involved in parish missions to gain experience. I was quickly drawn into leading bible studies, then into leading one of the groups, and eventually having pastoral responsibility for a number of groups. This was immensely valuable, and ever since I have encouraged the formation of bible study groups in church life, led by laymen. In addition, as a member of the Steward's Trust, I would attend training weekends at Ashburnham most months, excellent courses which grounded us in the Scriptures and equipped us by the Spirit for the work of the Kingdom. Ashburnham Place became very much a spiritual home, to which I often returned in later years.

London was blessed with a number of good teaching churches and I owe a tremendous debt to Dick Lucas at St Helen's, Bishopsgate, John Stott at All Soul's, Langham Place, and Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones at Westminster Chapel for all they taught me about preaching and about the evangelical faith. I attended all these churches for particular purposes. St. Helen's was particularly convenient for midweek lunch hour services when I was working in the City, both for taking non-Christian colleagues to hear the gospel, and for receiving clear biblical teaching for Christians. I took advantage of the Annual Training Course at All Soul's for those wanting to be involved in the ministry of the church. And I attended various series of sermons at each of them.

But I also saw it was important to be actively involved in the local church. My early connections with the Church of Scotland were conveniently broken when the organist and part of the choir (members of the BBC Chorus) transferred to a middle-of-the-road Anglican church in Paddington, at the very time when I myself had moved to Paddington. So it seemed natural to join that church and its choir. There I was confirmed into the Church of England, and found myself not only involved in house groups and on the PCC, but as a PCC member involved in a Stewardship campaign. Visiting Electoral Roll members was a fairly thankless task, and the level of giving was pretty abysmal by Biblical standards (the highest giving was only 10 bob a week), but it at least got me started on

systematic giving.

I remember the year I decided to tithe my paltry income, covenanting a sum to the local church, and promising to myself that at the financial year's end I would send the remainder to various missionary causes. On the day when I was due to send off the cheques (Good Friday), I crashed a car. I was immediately put to the test. I had plans to go on holiday. I only had enough money to fix the car and either go on holiday or honour my tithe. Frankly, my decision was not in doubt. I would pay my missionary tithe and send the cheques off, I would pay for the damage to the car, and if no more money came my way, I would forgo that holiday in Portugal and offer to go on a Pathfinder camp! Come Ascension Day, I attended an early service at St Helen's before going to work, and the message that struck me right between the eyes was 'He ascended up on high and gave gifts to men'. I got back home that evening, and found to my delight a cheque for the exact amount needed that weekend to pay for my airfare to Portugal. What marvellous timing. God honours those who honour him. As it turned out, what happened in Portugal had everything to do with God's plan for my future.

Moving from my digs at the top of a hotel in Paddington to share a flat in Earl's Court with some Christians in the Steward's Trust, whilst I continued my commitment in Sussex Gardens, I began in a small way to foster some links with my local church in Earl's Court. I would go to the 8,00 am Holy Communion, a quiet service at which I often drowsed off, but I was beginning to appreciate the wonderful gospel structure of the 1662 Order. I would sometimes go to their Youth Fellowship as a means of witnessing to the young people. And very occasionally I supported the Bible Study group, though my only memory of it was a visit by Colin Buchanan. The church had no teaching ministry.

It became obvious that the local curate had very little understanding of the gospel. So I took it into my hands to befriend him and share my faith with him. He was warmly responsive. In due course we invited him to our flat, where we had a Navigator leading a training day, and much to my surprise he came. At one point I anticipated an embarrassing moment for him, for each person present was encouraged to share his testimony. When it came to his turn I was absolutely thrilled to find him sharing how through our friendship he had come to know Jesus Christ in a personal away. And from then on he was eager to learn more, and his preaching took on a new lease of life.

Soon after this came preparations for the Billy Graham Crusade to London in 1966. He was glad to be involved. And so were we. Those in the Steward's Trust were heavily into the training of Bible study leaders (as follow up to the Mission). And come the Crusade itself it was an experience that will remain indelibly in my mind, seeing hundreds of people night after night getting up out of their seats in response to Billy's appeal, and having the privilege of counselling them. It was an experience to be repeated in 1967, then again in 1984, 85 and 89. The one meeting I did miss in 66 was the closing event at Wembley, which I made up for in 1989. I missed the meeting because of the holiday in Portugal.

The holiday was idyllic in many ways. Great Christian company. Marvellous weather. An unspoilt beach. Plenty of time to unwind, relax, drink wine, enjoy music, and read books. For some reason I took with me a 19th century commentary on the prophet Jonah, which I savoured with an increasing appetite day by day. Then one night, when it was exceedingly hot and humid, half asleep, half awake, I sensed the call of God upon my life. Through my mind went all kinds of verses, like: "How can they hear without a preacher?" and "If the people be not warned... his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" and

the verses I had reached in the commentary: "And the word of the Lord came un' o Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. " At first I thought perhaps God was challenging me afresh to be a more determined witness in my work situation in the City. But, very quickly, I just knew, indeed I was left in no doubt that night, that God was calling me into the full-time work of the ordained ministry in the Church of England. I was both thrilled and in awe at the prospect.

As soon as I returned to England I put that call to the test, And God wonderfully confirmed the way. He cut the usual Anglican red tape in a series of remarkable events that found me at theological college against all the odds in record time. And so I began training for the ministry at Oak Hill College, a lovely country mansion (said the brochure), with its 60 acres of farm, ornamental gardens, park and woodland." The diocesan border cuts right across the grounds, dividing the chapel from the cows, and no doubt the liturgical oversight of the Bishop of St Alban's (at that time Dr Robert Runcie) was more than matched by the lactarial oversight of his London colleague!

### **THEOLOGICAL TRAINING**

Oak Hill has a strongly conservative evangelical tradition, the tradition I had grown into as part and parcel of becoming a Christian only three years before. I was proud to belong to a body of believers who insisted on the authority of Scripture, justification by faith, assurance of salvation, and the substitutionary atonement. I was glad for the encouragement of a strong devotional life and the provision of personal Quiet Times'; I lapped up the expository preaching of Alan Stibbs and the brilliant OT teaching of John Taylor (now Bishop of St. Albans); and I was thrilled to be in an environment where evangelistic and missionary concern were high on the agenda. It was a privilege to mix with EFAC Bursary students mainly from East Africa and to be challenged by their Christ-centred conversation at all times. I enjoyed too the opportunities for experimental worship.

But there were some things I found testing. Mixing with ordinands from very different backgrounds was a shock at first. It was a shock for others too. People were amused by my posh accent, and in one college Christmas concert there was a skit about those entering college all very different and leaving college all like me, It was hard having to wear gowns as the college uniform. It seemed so out of keeping with the times. One day someone hid them, much to the embarrassment of the staff on some important occasion. The college was run much like a boarding school, except there were married students who mostly disappeared at weekends. Singles felt hard done by. I also found it difficult to see why the college did not allow things charismatic to take place on the premises. At one time a group of students had introduced Compline, apparently with the Principal's permission. I led a delegation to protest against this pre~ reformation service taking place in an evangelical college (a service I now enjoy), only to be told that 'charismatics' like myself were, after all, permitted to go to Fountain Trust meetings. I never quite saw the logic of that, and always felt it a shame that we were not encouraged to be equally open to the Word and the Spirit.

Then of course there were the exams. Oak Hill was not an academic college. Most people at that time did GOEs. But it was hoped I might be able to do a degree, though they wanted to make sure I was up to it. So first I sat for General Ordination exams. Then I did a Dip. Th. which exempted me from the GOEs. And at long last I took the BD, which made the Dip. Th. superfluous. It took a long time, and I am only glad I was allowed a year's break at Tyndale House in Cambridge, for a change of scenery and a rich (and romantic)

experience of University life, in the midst of my time at Oak Hill.

The college experience also taught me to trust in God for his provision. The vacations did too. One Easter vacation I was staying in college, for I had nowhere else to stay. It was 1969. Walking down the drive I clearly heard God's voice behind me telling me quite unmistakably: "Go to Eastern Europe." But how? I had little cash, so going by car was out of the question. I had never hitched before in my life. And I had been told that visas for Czechoslovakia, for example, took a fortnight to obtain, since Russia had invaded and deposed Dubcek. But I set off in faith. The visa took 10 minutes to get. I drove to Folkestone, caught a ferry to Belgium, hitched a lift to Austria, and in the next two weeks travelled 3000 miles in 59 vehicles through nine countries arriving back in Cambridge bang on schedule, and apart from the visas and ferry fare, the whole venture cost me two quid. The highlights were visiting a Baptist church in Timisoara in Romania, being forced at gunpoint to hitch a lift in Hungary, being run over by a train on the Polish frontier of Czechoslovakia, and undergoing police interrogation there, and making contact with people whom I would meet up with again the following year. My faith in God grew immeasurably. Where God calls, he provides and blesses, as we reach out in faith, depending entirely on him.

The Eastern Europe experience encouraged me no end to trust God to lead me in my intended visit to the USA that summer. He bountifully supplied my needs there, enabling me to visit 48 different states, and to have the privilege of preaching and sharing my faith at all kinds of meetings both in the open air (as in Wall Street, New York) and in churches, Episcopal and Baptist. I had a wonderful time at very little expense. And throughout it all the text<sup>1</sup> before me was: *'Be glad for all God is planning for you.'*

The following year I toured Scandinavia and East Africa, again having numerous opportunities to preach the gospel in cathedral and out in the wild. These experiences widened my interest in missionary work and gave me a broader insight into God's work beyond our shores.

How often when reporting to the college at the beginning of term I found I had been following Maurice Wood on his globetrotting ministry. Well, all good things come to an end. And so did my five years of learning and adventure. Maurice Wood and I left together: he to the See of Norwich as their new Diocesan Bishop; me to the top-executive parish of Christ Church, Chorleywood to serve there for three delightful years as curate, living on the very desirable Loudwater Estate.

## **FIRST CURACY**

In many ways it is in a curacy that the real training begins. I could not have had a better vicar in Peter Sartin<sup>2</sup> (a marvellous pastor and preacher), or greater pleasure in learning the ropes. My time was mainly spent visiting every home in the parish, and building up the young people's work, about which I knew next to nothing. They were exciting days, not least because of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. My days at Oak Hill were tremendously helpful in many ways, but because the charismatic dimension was forbidden, my own charismatic experience had waned. There came the day when I really needed a fresh empowering of the Spirit in order to minister to others.

It was during a mission led jointly by David Watson and Arthur Rose at which some 120 people responded positively to the Christ that I asked David to pray for me with the laying on of hands. It was such a powerful and exhilarating

experience that my vicar was startled to see me bouncing around his garden on a pogo-stick! In due course we saw the whole church discover charismatic renewal.

It happened first among some of the young people, largely as a result of a young people's house party at Buckland Filleigh in Devon, where they had received a remarkable experience of God's love and power, and been released into a new freedom in worship. There we had experienced for the first time what seemed a taste of heaven itself in the beautiful and uplifting singing in tongues and the gentle worship choruses; some even saw angels. Nor were we ignorant of the devil's devices, for his power was at work there, too, and on that house party we had our first encounter with the mighty and victorious deliverance ministry of Jesus. But it was the worship in our hearts, the being lost in wonder, love and praise, the touch of the Spirit of God upon our lives, that we took back to Chorleywood, and that so transformed the worship in church, and, incidentally, caused numerous conversions within the Young People's Fellowship. Experimental services for youth and for their parents were especially blessed by the beginnings of charismatic worship.

Furthermore, charismatic renewal effected the wider fellowship of the church as a result of an initiative from one of the churchwardens. One Sunday night, at a meeting following the service, through the ministry of neighbouring vicar John Perry (now Bishop of Southampton), the head of every department in the church felt the gentle and loving touch of God's Spirit. There was no stopping the churchwardens from evangelising after that! (And when they took on board Evangelism Explosion, no-one, not even the vicar, could stop them). With the charismatic renewal came numerical growth in the congregation, and among the young people's work. The Nottingham Fountain Trust Conference and the ministry of the Fisherfolk also made a great impact on the style and quality of worship in Chorleywood, on the building up of Body Life, and on how we evangelised. Outsiders were beginning to notice a significant change in our lives.

However much I enjoyed my years in Chorleywood, I knew the day would come when I had to move on to a different parish and learn wider skills in ministry. So come Easter week 1974 I left Chorleywood for Brighton, and went straight off to the Holy Land for a short holiday. Many of the usual tourist sites were visited, but I suppose the most memorable experience of all was my visit to the lovely village of Emmaus, reading the plaque there with these beautiful words:

"Easter, morning has come; Easter, care has gone home; Easter, the Lord is with us; Easter, our hearts do burn; Easter, our grief has gone. Jesus, Jesus is with us, to celebrate the feast of love,"

And then walking back along the footpaths and across the fields towards Jerusalem on that hot May day, and truly sensing the presence of the risen Lord<sup>3</sup>.

### **ASSOCIATE VICAR**

Back from Israel, I arrived in Brighton, to serve alongside Ian Barclay, whose preaching ability I had greatly admired whilst he had been associate vicar at St. Helen's, Bishopsgate. I had myself approached him to see if he would like a colleague, and he had readily agreed to my coming as 'associate vicar' It was not an easy parish; a whole string of vicars there had had nervous breakdowns, and Ian too came under great pressure from many quarters. The main ministry was among students, spearheaded by a YWAM (Youth with a Mission) Team



resident in the parish. It turned out that my own attempt to find a niche for my ministry was constantly thwarted, and in the end it seemed the best thing to move on. Relationships were strained and there were faults on both sides. The experience brought deep hurt and I was greatly comforted by a verse Bishop Dick Lyth shared with me: "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them." And it turned out to be for the best. My future ministry was greatly enhanced by the things I had learned during those difficult months, and it just so happened I met someone there who would one day transform my life, my future wife, Chris Fellingham, though it was not to be for another five years before the realisation dawned!

### **CURATE IN CHARGE**

In search of pastures new, I happened to be passing through Nottingham, and contacting George Carey (now Archbishop of Canterbury) then on the staff of St. John's Theological College (I had known him when he was on the staff at Oak Hill), he told me of a church nearby that might be just the job for me. It was a daughter church to Attenborough, and had been without a curate for eighteen months, and really run down. In a matter of weeks I was warmly welcomed there as curate in charge, and for the first time was able to spread my wings and put all I had learned into practice.

I could not have asked for a better group of people to serve. They responded well to my leadership. We introduced a weekly family service and in a matter of months the congregation grew rapidly. Services were lively, there was a warm friendly atmosphere, and my expository preaching was much appreciated. My main ministry (my prime task) I saw as 'building up the saints for the work of ministry', so I concentrated on the midweek central meeting, and tried to encourage those in the Methodist church to join us midweek as well as for the monthly joint services. In due course we saw a growing relationship develop between the churches, with neighbourhood groups set up for bible study and fellowship, alternating with central meetings which were becoming increasingly celebratory events.

I also encouraged vigorous outreach. This included selected door to door visiting, and it was a thrill, when the fellowship reported back the first night to hear how a few people had positively responded to the gospel. My own experience had not been so thrilling. The person with whom I had gone visiting put his foot in it all along the line, and I felt thoroughly embarrassed by it all. I went round to the couple visited next day to apologise. But God turned it to his good purposes, and only a short time later, the husband rang me up to say: 'I've been saved!' Not long after that he became a most supportive and valuable churchwarden. So the door-to-door visiting was not without success.

Every year in August we mounted quite a successful Holiday Special that reached many youngsters not involved in the Sunday Schools and created much good will in the parish. Helpers came from both churches, and the climax of the week would be a united family service, with a resume of the drama and teaching of the week. I got my inspiration and training for this at Chorleywood, where over 1000 children would come together for a Holiday Week on the Common. Toton was a smaller place, but we often got 200 children, and some came to faith in Jesus. It was always great fun and rewarding to all who took part, often at great cost.

We were also greatly blessed by a united mission led by faithsharing teams from Chorleywood. It was a major triumph getting the churches together on this, and we went through quite a few pain barriers during the long months of

preparation to achieve this. But it was the beginning of a close partnership between the Methodist leaders and ourselves. We had a tremendous publicity build up to the mission itself, culminating in a Radio Trent Sunday morning interview with the Methodist minister and myself. Unfortunately he told me the interview was at Radio Nottingham. So I turned up there. Realising there was some mistake, I tried finding Radio Trent but without success. No-one could direct me, and there was virtually no-one on the streets at seven in the morning to ask. I tuned into Radio Trent: the programme was already on the air, the Methodist minister struggling to answer the questions, for he had been relying on me for the detailed information. Feeling a bit nervous about going on the air anyhow, I decided to leave him to it, and made for home! (My time on Radio Trent would come another day.) Barry Kissell has written that that mission was a significant time in his own ministry, in learning to hear what the Lord would have him to say to a particular situation, rather than sifting out which of his prepared talks seemed most relevant. Quite a number came to faith during those five days, and many more were filled with the Spirit.

Another significant event was the visit by Jackie Pullinger, whom I had known from the days before she had first set off for Hong Kong's Walled City. As in Chorleywood, so in Toton, we saw the heads of every department in the church's life experiencing gifts of the Spirit, a real boon that ensures there is no split in the church over charismatic issues.

Jackie was one of the missionaries we supported as a church.

We also supported John Ellison (now Bishop of Paraguay) who worked then with SU and SAMS out in Argentina. I had first come across him in Chorleywood, where the church had also supported him. I have always believed in forming close links with 'mission partners' (as they are called today) and in Toton we ensured that one tenth of our church income went to missionary societies, and that there were good communications between the church and those supported, and an attractive missionary display board in church. It was particularly rewarding to support those who were good communicators themselves and who could preach well when they came on furlough. Often their contributions helped to the upbuilding and extension of the church in Toton.

As the work developed so the groups multiplied: youthquake for the young people, 2540 for young couples (in the 25-40 bracket), meeting point and home makers for ladies, and a men's group. Whilst preparing for a talk on Paul's first visit to Philippi where he met the ladies praying by the riverside, I had been struck by the fact that there was no synagogue there because they did not build them unless there were ten Jewish men in the community. And it seemed to me that we could not expect to run a church viably unless we had ten committed men, who would be able to support the finances of the church. So it became our aim to see ten men converted to Christ. The men's group was one vehicle towards that end. And God began bringing men in to his Kingdom. And many were converted over the years, such that with the able leadership of those who followed me, the church has continued to grow and a new church centre opened.

Having been there for well over four years I was beginning to wonder whether God would have me elsewhere. I was still a bachelor, and didn't relish the idea of another parish on my own. But I could not remain a curate for ever. Following a time of receiving counsel from Frank Lake over some related matter, I happened to visit Brighton, where I had maintained contact with one family quite regularly, and on this particular occasion a certain young lady wasn't there. I happened to be talking on the subject of marriage to her brother, and bluntly asked him whom he thought would make a suitable partner for me. "My sister,"

he said. "But." I protested.

It wasn't quite an arranged marriage (as some have intimated), though it soon became clear that God had brought us together. I did not then know that for nearly five years Christine had calmly and confidently hoped for this day, and it did not take very long for me to succumb to her charms. Living busy lives a fair distance apart (she was then a deputy head of a school in Surrey) did not make it easy to get to know each other, so we planned to go camping that summer near Criccieth in north Wales. The weather was exceeding wet and windy, but on one particular Sunday afternoon the sun emerged from behind the clouds and shone brightly as we crossed over an old, rickety footbridge astride a stream and I popped the question I had hardly dared to ask all week, and did we jump for joy Small wonder next time we visited that spot the bridge had vanished.

And so it transpired that just four months later on January 5, 1980, David Bubbers, then General Secretary of CPAS, conducted our wedding at Bishop Hannington Church, Hove, and we were able to announce at the reception that I was shortly to become Rector of St Peter's Tollerton. God's timing was impeccable, as ever.

So my time in Toton swiftly came to a very happy end, as we began a new chapter in our lives in what turned out to be a very different kind of parish only twenty minutes away, with a wholly different set of challenges. But we would face them together with the Lord who had led us there.

#### NOTES:

1. Romans 12:12, The Living Bible.
2. I made a point of contacting those who had formerly served with Peter Sartin. Among these was Tom Walker, now Archdeacon of Nottingham, in those days on the staff of Birmingham Cathedral. I shall never forget Tom Walker's commendation of Peter Sartin: "I can think of no better man in all England to work with"
3. Malcolm Muggeridge in his book *Another King* recounts a similar experience when walking along the Emmaus Road with a friend of being "joined by a third presence".

**CHAPTER FOUR****THE VILLAGE CHURCH (1980)**

The new Patronage Measure (which came into force in 1989) leaves much to be desired, and makes the deployment of clergy a complicated and often drawn out affair. Clearly the old system needed transforming. Clergy seeking a move only heard of vacancies either by hearsay or through receiving an invitation. Private patrons often had insufficient contacts to make a satisfactory choice of a new incumbent. Parochial Church Councillors did not feel they had enough influence. And Bishops felt hamstrung by the parson's freehold to redeploy clergy to fit in with their strategic planning. The new measure certainly means that PCCs have a greater say in the choice of incumbent, and clergy have the advantage of seeing some vacancies advertised, but Bishops are still restricted by the increased powers of PCCs, and clergy considering a move often wait a very long time for a suitable new post, which can be a very unsettling experience for them and those in the know within the parish.

It so happened that towards the end of 1979, having already made it clear that I had been ready for a move for quite some time, I heard through my churchwarden that Tollerton was vacant, (He knew someone who worshipped there. In those days vacancies were not yet advertised within the diocese). I had also noticed in Diocesan House a plan on display of the New Rectory at Tollerton, which had been built about three years before. I made enquiries, and met my churchwarden's friend, who was on the Tollerton PCC. He had painted a fairly rosy picture of the church, or so it seemed in retrospect. A theological college lecturer, who had contacts there, had said that the fellowship, which was into renewal, was ready for its roof to be lifted off. It sounded a hopeful situation, with possibilities for my gifts to be suitably realised. I expressed my interest to the authorities. There was a certain reluctance at first from the Diocesan Bishop, who had in mind my going to a larger church (not that he offered me one), and who imagined I would be unwilling to sport a clerical collar in Tollerton (since I had not worn one in Toton, or in Brighton, for that matter). But eventually he put my name forward to the Patron, who interviewed me in Bedford, with the one proviso that if I were appointed to the living I would not cause the church to go High Church or Tractarian. She preferred it to remain low in churchmanship. And this I could readily assure her.

Eventually, I was invited for an interview in the parish, and met the wardens who showed me over the Rectory and the Parish Church. They were clearly proud of St. Peter's and concerned for its welfare and traditions, and very much looking forward to someone coming to bring them fresh heart and lighten their heavy load, for the interregnum had gone on for quite long enough. We then joined two ladies, who questioned me and expressed the church's desire for an incumbent with a strong and charismatic leadership, and for his wife (echoes of unpaid curate?) to take on the Sunday School (shortly to be affiliated to CYPEC, a department of the Church Pastoral Aid Society). I could give them no guarantees about my future wife's role, but I assured them that if the church fellowship was looking for someone who would give them a firm lead, both biblical and charismatic, I could give it. By God's good providence I was invited to the post.

Perhaps, if at the time I was given a more realistic picture of how things really were, I might have looked elsewhere. Bishop Patrick Harris is surely right when he wrote in his Discussion paper in 1989: "We need to help clergy to grasp both the general nature and type of community they are moving into, and also the

particular situation of their Church. Incidentally, I find that the Church of England's etiquette, which virtually bans consultation and communication between outgoing and incoming incumbents baffling and needing to be questioned." Had we consulted and known more, we might certainly have tackled things differently from the start. As it was we met with stiff resistance very soon after our arrival Nevertheless my wife and I knew in our hearts that God had called us to Tollerton. And to Tollerton we would be committed into the next decade.

What did we find? We found what the estate agents might describe as a 'desirable' village, just five miles south of Nottingham, a mile from Nottingham airport, situated between the busy Melton road and the A52 to Grantham. One previous Rector described the population of 1900 as 'well heeled'; certainly you need to be well heeled to afford the housing, so there are few first time buyers. And there is no council housing. It is very much a commuting, dormitory village (with a village mentality), with a few shops, a Methodist church and a public house at its centre, an excellent primary school, and the whole surrounded by farms. This main centre of population has grown since the second world war.

The original village begins a good half mile away, and consists today mainly of attractive renovated homes, some of them listed buildings, set in beautiful gardens, astride Tollerton Lane. At the double bend is a complex of buildings associated historically with the parish church of St. Peter's, which is itself largely hidden from view: the Rectory, Church Centre and Scout Hut alongside, surrounded by paddock and orchard, and two other privately owned buildings: the 18th century Old Rectory (the home of the Rector until 1975) and the 17th century Tollerton Hall (once the home of the village squire, at various times since a hotel, prisoner of war camp, theological college, Roman Catholic St. Hugh's College, and now the headquarters of a local insurance company).

### **LORDS OF THE MANOR**

The village of Tollerton does not enjoy a history of great significance to the outsider. No really famous people are recorded as passing through Tollerton or resident there. A former Rector of Tollerton back in the 1920s, Sidney Potter, wrote 'A History of Tollerton', not well written, but it gives a brief glimpse at the feudal nature of life in the village until the 1930s, and of the often strained relationship between the village squires at Tollerton Hall and the Rectors living in the Old Rectory in the last century.

The two happenings that most interested me in his book occurred in the early 19th century. The first was in 1812, when the eccentric Lord of the manor, Pendock Neale (later Barry) <with delusions of grandeur> pulled down the old gabled tower, the roof and much of the walling of the medieval church nave, and built an ambulatory from the hall to the church, constructed a Mausoleum for the burial of his family, and built a new tower to resemble that of Magdalene College, Oxford, and a gallery containing his family pew and a grey marble fireplace at which they warmed themselves. And he couldn't wait to restore the chancel, too, but for this he had to await the death of his namesake Rector, Pendock Neale, four years later.

In dispute with his cousin over the extent of the churchyard, he erected a high wall so that his claim might prevail and the church might be blotted from his sight as he stepped out of his front door. At the same time, not liking the Rector's preaching, which was held in high regard elsewhere, he forced his parishioners to worship at Plumtree.

Although mercifully the church is free from squires today, it did seem that in some way this feudalistic spirit still prevailed when first we came to Tollerton, (and those who had worked for the Lords of the manor up until 1935 and forced to attend church were now most reluctant to worship in church) and the influence past squires had had on the life and worship of the church had by no means gone. (And there were others, in the community, who took on the role of squire, within and outside the church, and those under their influence again gravitated towards Plurmtree!

On our first Sunday in Tollerton, my wife was sitting in her pew, gazing at one of the Hatchments on the wall ahead of her, when someone tapped her on the shoulder and said: I see you are admiring our hatchments. She was doing nothing of the kind. Rather she was horrified that there should be a depiction of a skull staring right at her in a service of worship. It became evident in later years that these hatchments (heraldic funeral memorials of former Lords of the manor and Rectors), which totally surrounded the congregation, spread an air of death upon us, and it became necessary (some five years later), as I shall recount, to exercise deliverance ministry in this matter. We still have the hatchments in church (including the one with a skull, representing the last of a line), but now they are up high at clerestory level, to be seen by those who wish to see them, but no longer a visual distraction to our worship of our risen Saviour and Lord. How much better it is to have colourful banners to enhance our worship at the lower level!

## **ORCHESTRA**

The other happening that caught my attention (in the History of Tollerton) concerned music in church. Here was the pleasant insight that in the mid nineteenth century, before the harmonium and the organ were introduced, it was quite common to have what they called an orchestra. The records tell us at one time: A Force played the violin, John Duke the doublebass, Burton the flageolette, and Rector Ward's footman the cornopian. ' When we started introducing additional instruments like guitars, bassoon, recorders, piano etc. this met with considerable disapproval. For by this time the organ (and organist) dominated in more ways than one. So it was convenient to say not only that what we were introducing had biblical warrant, but that we were only reintroducing what used to be done and approved of in the past. The parish has records of the fierce opposition to the introduction of the organ in 1869, which ousted the sixpiece orchestra. The introduction by the parson of a hymn book which included hymns by Watts, Toplady and others was regarded by the squire as a crowning offence.

The one thing that has significantly changed over the past decade is the worship, and since setting the congregation free from the hold of the past (local arrogant feudalism) and restoring the worship according to biblical principles in the power of the Spirit, we truly appreciate the benefits of other instruments and instrumentalists in our Sunday services in church, not least the electronic keyboard.

## **VISION AND HOPE**

Someone I met was recounting his interview as a prospective incumbent of a parish. He was asked whether he had a vision for the church there. He said, "No, but I will have within 6 months." He was appointed. Within six months he had introduced that church to a vision which, the truth be known, he had already formulated in his mind from the start.

In my case I did not come with any pre-packaged vision, but I did come with a clear programme (partly drawn from my experience at Toton, partly inspired by the needs I saw in Tollerton) which I spelt out at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting which took place only a fortnight after my arrival.

In my remarks I spelt out the need to have a vision, to have a strategy for mission rather than maintenance, and 'to envisage the day when St. Peter's Church can stand securely on its feet, strong in numbers, mature in faith, and wide open to the Spirit's leading; not a collection of individuals swayed by or indifferent to the latest brainstorm of the Rector, but a body of Christ, united, exercising a varied ministry and striving to present every man mature in Christ. To achieve such a goal I suggested the need to share a fourfold vision, concerning men, money, mission and ministry: a vision of reaching men for Christ, born again of the Spirit and fully committed to Christ and his Church; a vision of a Church honouring the Lord in its finances, looking not to jumble sales and fetes but to the Lord, through his people, giving sacrificially, directly and out of a joyous heart; a vision of active support of the work of Christian mission, including tithing of church income; and a vision of a developing ministry of the whole people of God, each and every member exercising gifts for the common good, praying together, learning together, and opening our lives to one another and to God.

I also spelt out in the Sunday evening sermon just prior to the Annual Meeting some of the responsibilities (legal, social and pastoral) of churchwardens and what kind of people should be eligible for such an office and other positions of responsibility within the church, as I saw them in my understanding of Acts 6. They were to be people who were born again, with a definite experience of conversion, with a clear testimony to the saving grace of God. They were to be people who had a good reputation in the church and in the community. And they were to be full of the Holy Spirit. More important than popularity, seniority, or even ability was spirituality. Furthermore, they were to be people full of discernment and heavenly wisdom, and people full of faith. God's work is made or marred, advanced or retarded, by the quality of those who are placed in office.

I pointed out that some of those chosen to serve at tables in Acts 6 later became involved in adventurous evangelism (like Philip), together with a signs and wonders ministry, or became powerful preachers (like Stephen) who spelt out the need for change, saw visions but in the end faced martyrdom. And I gave modern day illustrations of churchwardens I had known who knew what it was to engage in evangelism and preaching and were willing to face the flack in the cause of bringing about necessary changes in the life of the church. Such were those chosen in Acts 6: men of Christian vitality and tremendous vision. And such, I suggested, are the kind of people we needed in positions of responsibility in the church of today.

It has to be said that not everyone welcomed either what I taught in church or suggested at the Annual Meeting. Certainly the churchwardens were a little non-plussed, and one wondered whether he ought not to withdraw his nomination. They had already become a little fearful as a result of hearing the tape of a broadcast interview on Radio Trent in which I had described some of the exciting things that had been happening in my previous parish in worship and in evangelism. What had they let themselves in for?

In retrospect, perhaps I should have been a little more reticent and guarded, and couched my language in a gentler way. But I was laying down biblical foundations from the start, foundations that were vital to the ministry that would in due course develop and mature.

It was not long before I realised that my ministry in Tollerton would have an element of the Jeremiah in it. At his calling, the Lord told him *'Today I give you authority... to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant'* (Jeremiah 1:10). And so it turned out: before the planting and building could take place came the uprooting of the church. It certainly wasn't my choice, but that's the way it happened.

Essentially, mine is a teaching ministry. In my first magazine letter in Tollerton News, written on St. Patrick's Day and before my induction service, I said to my readers: 'I come to you with a strong sense of God's calling and with the same determination to break the power of paganism still in our land, and through faithful teaching and preaching I hope there may arise a church in Tollerton consisting of folk of all ages who have opened their lives to the risen Christ and who seek to love and serve him in the power of the Holy Spirit.'

Such a church has arisen, but not without great pain. And I could not even have begun to bring it about without the calling of God behind me, the grace of God within me and the benediction of God upon me, expounded at my institution and induction by Bishop Denis Wakeling: *'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'* (Romans 15:13).



**CHAPTER FIVE****UPROOTING THE CHURCH (1980-82)**

Our early years in Tollerton were not the happiest. And our every move was seen as a break with convention. The honeymoon months that most incumbents can expect when they arrive in a new parish were brought to an abrupt end within days. For we inherited a congregation that was riddled with problems that had never really been tackled and resolved over the years. There is one mark of the church that is sadly lacking in the 39 Articles of Religion listed at the back of the Book of Common Prayer, though included in some reformation articles, namely the mark of love and the exercise of discipline within the church. Although the pure word of God had been preached in the church for a number of years by evangelical ministers, and the sacraments duly ministered, there was little evidence of a church that bore the fruit of an evangelical ministry.

As far as we could discern, no one, still linked with the parish church, had come to a living faith through my predecessors' ministries. To be sure, there were a few in the church who were very much 'untaught' Christians, and given the opportunity of responding to the Gospel did so. But for the most part the worshipping congregation consisted of those whom one could best describe as 'nominalists' or traditionalists, who were in no position to testify to being born again or saved, whose faith seemed more nominal than real, and who did not take kindly to the proclamation of the evangel, to the claims of Christ upon them, to the call for personal and corporate commitment, nor to the introduction of Good News Bibles in the pews or the overhead projector, which simply underlined with greater clarity the message many preferred to evade.

There was also a small group of people who had arrived in Tollerton as 'evangelical' Christians, two of whom had even managed to get onto the PCC, ex officio, as Deanery Synod members. There was also a group of people who were into 'renewal', which largely meant they sang a few charismatic songs and lifted their open hands as far as their waist line as an act of devotion, but most of these only attended the midweek fellowship group, and were fairly untaught in the Bible.

Furthermore there were some formidable people who enjoyed playing the power game. One former Rector referred to a similar group of very influential people who questioned everything he proposed. He soon learnt that they were known locally as the 'Royal Family', were accustomed to run everything in the village, and that he was proving less amenable than they had hoped. Every trivial problem produced a prolonged dispute. Minor issues would ignite infernos.

The power struggle had not abated in my day. A different set of people, quite as formidable and equally accustomed to getting their own way, especially during the interregnum, did their best, so it seemed to me at the time, to thwart my every move. My authority as their new Rector was neither respected nor accepted by them. Indeed, it was subtly undermined, making my work not a joy but a burden.

No-one likes change, least of all in a village. Few could understand why change was needed, and what mild changes were introduced caused real heartbreak. Several years later I revisited 'Willow Hayes', the house on Hayling Island where I lived as a child, a house built in the mid '50s of a Scandinavian design years ahead of its time, and even more important to me, the hut in the garden in which I made my den. The problem was, I could not recognise the place and I

could not fathom why, until I discovered it had all been pulled down and three new homes built in its place. I felt bereft. A whole part of my life seemed to be wrenched away from me. And I began to sense something of what it felt for certain parishioners when they found that various things they had been used to for years seemed no longer recognisable. I can understand their grief, and something of the accompanying emotions that caused them to leave their parish church altogether. But the time had come for a new order in the church.

Under my leadership, things were to be done in accordance with biblical principles, in the power of the Holy Spirit. And in my attempt to build the church on firm biblical foundations, it was almost inevitable that there would be some negative reaction. And there was.

## Negatives

### PCC

It was most noticeable on the Parochial Church Council. One of the first things we did was to open up our home, and we made a point of getting to know our PCC members by inviting them to a series of supper parties. But these hardly prepared me for the astonishing PCC meetings that followed.

Never before had I come across such an antagonistic assortment of churchgoers. They were quick to pillory almost any proposed change, with four or five people on occasions speaking in concert against me, as chairman, and quite unwilling even to give me a courteous hearing. In the back row, so I later discovered, some men even played chess to while away their time! Some issues were quite trivial, like whether it was appropriate for an overhead projector to be used in church (to say nothing of the screen obscuring one person's view of the 'altar' during the sermon, or whether it was necessary or desirable to have a pewslip. Some were more weighty, like the reintroduction of choruses and the guitar and other instruments, in family worship. But finance was one major issue that created great flack.

The PCC had reneged on a previous decision to tithe church income to mission. We were not in a healthy state financially. Much money was still needed to pay back on loans towards the cost of work on the pinnacles of the church tower and on the renovation of the organ. The patronal Gift Day (towards the church building) normally realised a paltry sum of £100, The church was more dependant on the Annual Fete and the Christmas Market, with its attendant 'gambling'.

One of the first questions I was asked by one PCC member at a Scout function was whether I approved of gambling, and, in expressing my viewpoint, received the retort: "Well, you'll have to change, Rector. We depend upon it here!" Knowing my objections to gambling, which had become evident in a particular sermon, I was courteously asked by the Fete organiser whether they should stop the gambling at the forthcoming Fete. I told him to let things be for that year, but it would need to be talked through for another year.

Come the following year, the decision was made (albeit with chairman's casting vote) to disband gambling at the Fete and to major on the direct giving of the Gift Day. I suggested a target of £1,000, which in those days seemed an astonishing sum for a Gift Day, and stretched my faith. The treasurer told us he had his ears to the ground and knew what Tollerton people gave, and no way would we get £1,000 unless I gave it. Many were silently adamant they would not give, to prove me wrong. But the outcome was truly astonishing: £1,740,

How we praised the Lord!

Sadly, the Lord did not get all the honour, for the news that spread through the parish was not of His bountiful provision, but of the resignation of our treasurer, and of others, too. But at last the finances of the church were put on a good footing, and from then on we depended no longer on Fetes and the like but on the regular direct giving of God's people, many of whom were beginning to discover the joy of tithing their income to the church, with the church in turn tithing its income to Christian mission at home and overseas.

My early months on the PCC were battle drawn over basics. The views of those few with strong biblical convictions were not warmly welcomed by the rest (who for the most part were not even regular worshippers), and it was not until the church was radically uprooted and replanted that the PCC began to operate Christianly.

From the start the Church Council met in our home. At that time my wife was not yet serving on the PCC. She shall never forget her amusement at seeing the ladies of the PCC out on our drive after the meeting, standing in a circle, chatting away, and in approaching them to say hello, finding the circle slowly moving down the drive away from her, totally excluding her from their conversation. We have come a long way since then, setting great store on open and honest fellowship with one another and on the conscious rejection of all gossip and tittle-tattle.

### **ST. PETER'S FELLOWSHIP**

Negatives not only emanated from the PCC, but also from what was known as the St. Peter's Fellowship, of which body I was chairman. At my induction, I was introduced to some who were on its committee, and told how much I would enjoy its informal atmosphere. But it soon became evident that it was an in-group which had very little to do with the life of the church. Inaugurated, some 25 years previously, by the Rector to further the religious and social life of the community, it no longer served both ends. It was basically a social organisation that increasingly served its own ends, a society which did not attract newcomers, and certainly did not encourage its members to come to church. Only one or two of its leaders ever attended St. Peter's. It was basically an amalgam of different clubs, providing facilities for Badminton, Chess, Archery, Photography, and Amateur Dramatics (and gossip!). There were monthly outings arranged to various places of interest midweek, and rambles on a Sunday. And profits from subscriptions would go to charitable causes.

In many ways such an organisation might have been a helpful means for church members to befriend people of like interest in the village and woo them into the life of the church and win them to Christ. But born-again Christians were thin on the ground in those days, and far too preoccupied getting the church in good order, and, in any case, the clubs did not attract them, nor was the atmosphere within St. Peter's Fellowship conducive to Christian witness, with many in its leadership antagonistic towards St. Peter's, often arranging fixtures that clashed with church services and the midweek fellowship. After six years, at a particularly busy time in the life of our church, I eventually resigned from its Chair.

But we were still greatly concerned that newcomers to Tollerton, reading the church magazine and village newsletter would suppose St. Peter's Fellowship had to do with the church. And we felt frustrated that we could not speak of our own church fellowship without it being confused with St. Peter's Fellowship. Mercifully, they eventually changed its name to Tollerton Village Fellowship.

Another power group that covertly acted against us were the freemasons. There were a large number of Masters present at my induction, and not a few attended church. Illustrative references to freemasonry in some of my sermons and cautionary literature about freemasonry on the church bookstall led to my receiving anonymous letters about their generous charitable giving, and also to some of them transferring their allegiance to another place where freemasonry was genuinely welcomed.

Another group that were none too helpful were those running the community play group. One day we received a angry delegation at our front door, because rumour had it that I had plans to kill the Rectory Room cat! If I went ahead, they threatened to break my front door down. We were greatly amused a few days later when a reporter from the Evening Post arrived at our doorstep to establish whether I really did intend killing the cat! It might have made good copy.

### **CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**

While we expected negative vibes from traditionalists on the PCC and from malcontents in the village, we were somewhat surprised to receive criticism and resistance from the Christians within the fellowship of the church. We had been led to believe that there was a lively midweek fellowship that was ready for 'the roof to lift off' under a charismatic leadership. It soon became evident some wanted us to keep our hands off it. They did not wish it to become the Rector's group. Whether due to my unaccustomed style of leadership or to the freedom enjoyed during the interregnum, we encountered a reluctance by one or two to accept my authority, we received criticism for giving the group a higher profile as part of the church's programme, and we sensed reservations by others about the new emphasis on Bible study. The group had been mildly into 'renewal', but not richly into the Word, and some attended other churches where they received contradictory teaching. We had problems, too, with internal discipline, for there was clear evidence within the church of sexual immorality, marital infidelity, bitterness of spirit, rebellious attitudes, and a spirit of independence, which could not be ignored.

Dealing firmly with such matters, correcting such attitudes, albeit with much patience and some gentleness, was not warmly welcomed. But it had to be done, for it is part of love to be responsible for another's holiness and to restore those who are caught in sin. In retrospect I might have been more gentle and gracious and forbearing than I was, but without a fellowship that had experienced the benefits of correction and discipline, it was inevitable that we lost some, before we gained others. Indeed we had been promised this in a vision that had been shared at our very first half night of prayer before our first Gift Day.

It was a simple prophetic picture, given by a visitor who years later joined our church as a committed member and married our churchwarden. Ann's picture was of a car crammed with people, careering down a hill, and crashing. It was not clear the extent of injury and hurt, but various people were later seen walking up the hill, in twos and threes, hand in hand, and happy.

At the time we did not receive this as a warning to prevent all this happening. Rather we received it as an encouragement that, whilst many would regretfully leave the church for any number of different reasons (not least being hurt at seeing 'their church' undergoing changes tantamount to its destruction), we were not to despair, for a new church would come into being, very different in character from the old. To be honest, we assumed then that many of those who

would be hurt and leave the church would in due course return to the renewed church, but it did not turn out that way, and maybe we were wrong to think that the people in the car were the same as those who walked up the hill. But such a hope buoyed us up when we might have despaired.

The uprooting of the church was a reality we would have to face, however painful and costly it might turn out to be. This did not mean that we allowed people to leave easily. To be sure, there were some about whom we were quite willing to shake the dust from our feet, but it brought us great pain whenever someone left us, and we always tried our best to offer an olive branch here and talk things through there and help them to understand why we were doing what we were and apologise where apology was called for. And it was a great joy to us when some of them changed their minds, and stuck with us, and became a real part of the changing church, even becoming committed members.

### **THE HIERARCHY**

One of the biggest disappointments in those early months was the attitude of those in the hierarchy. Rumours spread fast in a village, and letters of complaint soon found their way to the Bishop's Manor. It was a real source of grief to me that, whatever mistakes I might have made, whatever ways I might have done things better, I never felt I received a single word of encouragement or affirmation of my ministry from either Bishop or Archdeacon.

I would have valued positive input, advice and correction, if need be, but all I heard was criticism. I did not feel they really understood my situation as an evangelical in a non-evangelical parish, and in a rural parish at that. They had not ministered in such a situation themselves, and their comments seemed to be a projection of their own cautious, sensitive and diplomatic approach. The apostolic ministry has been given to build us up. In those days, I much regret, I failed to see this happen.

Parish ministry can be a lonely experience. To be an evangelical pastor in a non-evangelical church is extremely challenging and immensely draining. And he needs all the support he can muster. Often he won't get support from his own church fellowship, to begin with. He has to look outside. Surely he should be able to count on his bishop and his advisers.

### **SUPPORT GROUPS**

One source of support might have been the Eclectics Society, a group of Anglican Evangelical Clergy under the age of 40, who met in regional groups to discuss topics of practical interest, on the basis of an assumed agreement on the evangelical fundamentals. It so happened that since the late 1970's many clergy emanating from evangelical theological colleges were not agreed on the fundamentals. And instead of the regional group, of which I was secretary, being a support to those with very little support and fellowship in their own parishes, it became yet another group where we were battling out basic truths.

Another source of support might have been the Diocesan Renewal group for clergy, but there again, it was a disparate group of folk of different churchmanships, with a common desire for renewal, to be sure, but not necessarily a common desire to live under the authority of Scripture. I was becoming increasingly disenchanted by the state of the renewal movement in the diocese, where people were enjoying renewal without experiencing the joy of Biblical exposition.

The local Chapter meeting of clergy I hardly expected to be a source of support, for those in it hardly understood what it meant to exercise an evangelical ministry, though in later years it did become quite supportive. Perhaps I gained more support from the Fraternal in West Bridgford, where there were a few more evangelicals. But at the end of the day, we had to go it alone, depending on Christ, until the day came when the fellowship at St. Peter's became so real that we no longer needed to venture elsewhere. What was encouraging in those early days were the unexpected visits by CRAB Reps, who always had something to say to affirm us in our ministry, when we were living with so much criticism and negative reaction.

## **Positives**

But the early months and years were not all negative. There was much that was positive, and much to encourage us. The earliest 'positive' was the wonderfully practical welcome of Len and Iris, a retired couple who had been members of the church since the beginning of the last war, and who actively served the church in many ways, not least as PCC Secretary and 'Odd Job Man', Len was to receive Maundy money from the Queen, not long before his death, for his service to the community. From the start they made us feel at home, and at every step of the way they have been unstinting in their moral support, and it was a real thrill to us when their faith came to full flowering as a result of a Parish Mission, and they discovered the marvellous way God provides when we honour Him with our wealth.

Early on we arranged a Parish Day Conference, led by Charles and Pauline Green, from Chorleywood. Already the PCC had been encouraged to have a vision for the coming years, and this time of input and conferring enabled us to build on that vision, and set a direction for the church.

### **OUR VISION IS TO SEE OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS**

#### **(April 81-84)**

1. Our church building every Sunday full of people, who in glad response to God's love in Christ, are committed spiritually and financially to the maintenance of the church, its ministry and mission, through responsible, planned giving and personal practical support.
2. Our Sunday worship catering for the wide-ranging needs of the whole church family, and involving greater congregational participation in its preparation and presentation, through, e.g. the encouragement of occasional worship workshops.
3. Our church fellowship spiritually alive with a quality of life marked by mutual love and harmony, and taught in a systematic way not only on a Sunday but at midweek gatherings in the home.
4. Our church membership active in outreach and witness to the village community, seeking
  - a) to penetrate the social life of the parish, whether through a spiritually renewed St. Peter's Fellowship, through existing midweek Christian gatherings, like Talking Point, or through 4 or 5 geographically dispersed home groups, which will need to be formed for the purpose of teaching, worship, prayer, fellowship, pastoral care and evangelism;
  - b) to meet the pastoral needs of all categories of parishioners (e.g. men, the

lonely, 18-21's etc.) through practical care, nurtured, where necessary, by adequate training, and enhanced by the creation of a Care Group as an extension of a rejuvenated Neighbourhood Warden Scheme.

#### 5. The all-importance of corporate prayer for the enlargement and realisation of our vision to the greater glory of God.

One great bonus from that day was the beneficial effect on John and Jean, later to become significant leaders in the church that would emerge, setting examples in their family life and commitment to Christ and his church worthy of emulation by all.

Another highlight (not least for John and Jean) was the Parish Camp, held on the vicarage lawn at Barlestone. This was led by a team from Basingstoke Community Church (headed up by my brother-in-law's brother-in-law!). It was evangelistically fruitful, immensely challenging, deepened our fellowship and enriched our worship. It also sowed the seeds of the concept of 'committed membership', which seemed hard to envisage in an Anglican setting yet would eventually flower five years later.

Evangelism was much on our heart from the beginning, and over the months we held a number of evangelistic supper parties at the Rectory, largely off our own bat, to which we invited our personal contacts, and whilst there were some who responded in faith to the gospel, because there was not much of a fellowship to draw them into, and the church was not really ready to welcome them, they fell back. We were acutely aware that until the church was uprooted and planted afresh we would not contain new converts.

We supported local ventures of an evangelistic nature, such as the rather quaint yet adventurous New Life tent mission in Keyworth (organised by a small yet keen fellowship in the area), as we would later support the rather more fruitful tent mission in West Bridgford two years on (organised by a wider spectrum of churches). Through these ventures, we at least made ourselves known as a church concerned with evangelism.

But it might have been of greatest help to have had an implantation into our church from another like-minded church. We did approach a city-centre church that had link groups, if not in the parish, at least quite near us, to lend us some families, but none were deemed suitable. Many who drive past us to go into Nottingham are not the kind who are willing to get really involved. One of the strengths of the house church movement, and this is being emulated by the mainline churches, is the willingness to plant significant numbers into a new area to get the church started. We could have benefited from that, But we were advised it would not work, and that we could not expect to see our rural church taking on board the kind of things that went on in city-centre evangelical charismatic churches. (When, in fact, these very things began to happen, we were told that we were not really rural after all. You can't win!

The alternative was to pray that Christians would move into Tollerton, and that we would begin to draw families in from the immediate area. At the same time we had a vision for the villages south of Nottingham, and set up, in fellowship with a number of other churches and groups in the area, what we called Wolds Bible Ministries. The aim was to hold monthly Celebrations, mostly at St. Peter's on a Friday or Saturday, aimed at those living out in the villages where they possibly had no lively local church, and these were interspersed with evangelistic meetings, held in people's homes. At the same time I was invited to lead a series of meetings at a private home on Bunny Hill, and as a result we began to see one or two Christian families drawn into the life of our church.



It was time for another Parish Weekend, and this time we had an Anglican team from Northamptonshire. But in some ways they were a disappointment, firstly because they did not really appreciate where we were at, and how few Christians we had, and secondly because through immaturity amongst their young team they took sides with someone who was opposed to my ministry, doing irreparable harm. Nevertheless the gospel was faithfully presented, there was some helpful teaching on spiritual gifts, and our eyes were opened to new possibilities.

But progress was slow, and we were beginning to lose patience. Would the church ever get off the ground? I was greatly heartened by a timely word from Alec Motyer: I hope the Lord will bless you with much encouragement: we shall reap if we faint not.

Some verses that greatly impressed my wife at the time were Luke 13:6-8, the parable Jesus told about an unfruitful fig tree. Were we to despair and give up on the church in Tollerton? Would it never bear good fruit? The answer was to hold on and to pray. We were to wait 'one more year' and meanwhile look to see Christians joining us from outside the parish and encircling the parish just as the manure circled the fig-tree encouraging numerical and spiritual growth in the church.

When we arrived in Tollerton, it was our intention to stay either 3 years (if things did not work out 'successfully') or 10 years (if we saw real potential). After two years we were not at all sure how things would turn out, so we invited David Bubbers (Head of Church Pastoral Aid Society, and a family friend) to come and preach one weekend and talk things through. The upshot of the weekend was that he encouraged us to stay, and to invite Ian Knox, newly appointed as CPAS Staff Evangelist, to consider leading a Parish Mission in Tollerton. It was to be the start of an adventure from which we have never looked back, except in gratitude and awe. Through his ministry the church would at last be planted, and the fruit begin to grow.

#### NOTES:

1. It was some years before the church took seriously the importance of Hebrews 13:17, along with other similar verses like 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; and I Corinthians 16:15-16.
2. The pastoral epistles underline the importance of Christian leaders encouraging and rebuking with all authority (Titus 2:15) with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:2), not forgetting to set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12). Galatians 5 speaks of restoring with gentleness.
3. 'Committed membership', which will be explained in greater detail in later chapters, is a term which Anglicans find confusing, for they see membership of the church in terms of being baptised or confirmed or of being on the electoral roll. The concept fits more easily into a gathered church (like, say, the Baptists or the newer 'Restoration' churches) than a territorial church (like the Church of England) where anyone living in England belongs in some way to their parish church. The Church of England normally associates commitment with initiation, with the beginnings of becoming a Christian, rather than with ongoing service, though perhaps confirmation ought to become a commissioning service for ministry.

There are signs of change, however, as the church comes to terms with a new situation. The church is becoming more of a gathered church. And there has been seen the need in the light of the shrinking numbers of ordained priests to have



'ministry groups', and therefore the need for some kind of committed membership or register of accredited people to minister.

It is significant that in 1991 the Commitment Course, emanating from ABWON (Action for Biblical Witness to our Nation) and written by Tony Highton for those in their Link Church Ministry, is now in this Decade of Evangelism renamed 'Called to Serve' and the whole ministry has been renamed Time Ministries International, TIME standing for "Together for Intercession, Ministry and Evangelism". Those interested to find out more should contact: Time Ministries Int., Emmanuel Church, Main Road, Hockley, Essex, S95 4NR.

But in that this book is an historical account, the term 'committed membership' is the language we used.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PLANTING THE CHURCH (1983)

I was no stranger to parish missions. These had been significant and fruitful highlights in both Chorleywood (with David Watson and Arthur Rose) and Toton (with Barry Kissell and Peter Ashton), and I had myself been involved in parish missions as an ordinand in Rayleigh and Crawley. So I knew their value, especially if they were part of the regular ongoing mission of the local church. But it had not occurred to me that we had a sufficiently strong base from which to mount a mission in Tollerton, or that any reputable evangelist would want to come. Ian Knox's exploratory visit to our Rectory (in September 82) inspired in us an expectation that even with such slender resources a parish mission was possible (even if for only a few days), and that Ian was prepared to help us out. Even though his car developed a flat tyre on our drive, his confidence was in no way deflated; indeed it raised our hopes that something new could, indeed would, happen in the months ahead. The parish mission was fixed for the five days leading up to Advent Sunday 1983, over fourteen months ahead.

In the meantime we invited Ian to speak at an evangelistic supper at Bunny Hill, under the umbrella of Wolds Bible Ministries. It was remarkably well supported by Christians in the surrounding villages, not all of whom had brought along non-Christian friends, preferring to suss him out first, and Ian's message was warmly received. The event gave the very few from St. Peter's a foretaste of Ian's ministry.

Preparation for the mission did not begin immediately. Other evangelistic events were taking place, including the West Bridgford Tent Mission in May 83. Meanwhile one or two Christians joined our fellowship at this time. But Ian Knox did visit the fellowship in April to outline what was needed by way of preparation (including prayer triplets), a mission committee met in June, and preliminary plans were made regarding venues for the men's supper (which would be an important focus of the mission) and for the various coffee evenings and tea parties, and ideas were shared regarding publicity. By September details were finalised, including plans for publicising the event, plans which nearly failed to materialise, when everything went wrong at the last minute with the printing arrangements.

One very significant preparation for the five day mission was what we called the Battle Bus. Our small fellowship (which met either in house groups or centrally on a Tuesday evening) had hired a coach, and it was our intention to drive around the parish waging spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness that held back the light of Christ in our neighbourhood, and then to drive down every street in Tollerton (and if time in Plumtree too), praying for those on our lists <mostly our contacts> whom we intended to invite along to the mission. I asked the coach people whether they had any Christian drivers, to be told: 'Yes, we do have one who's semi-detached!' Whether he was the one who came in the end, I do not know, but the coach driver was thoroughly co-operative, turning off the engine whenever we stopped in a street, and seemingly enjoying what he heard, as we engaged in loud praise and effectual fervent prayer. We started out not a little fearful ourselves, and wondering what people might think of us. But we returned home that October night with a fresh confidence in what God would do, and the outcome of the mission itself was proof that the Battle Bus had been a crucial factor in its success. It galvanised the fellowship together with a single purpose, and brought fresh heart to us all.

There was a marvellous response to our invitations and many responded positively at the various meetings. Looking back I still wonder how we managed to mount so many events: a ladies lunch, three coffee evenings, a tea party for the older folk, a mums and toddlers group, a youth barbecue, the men's buffet at Blotts (a local restaurant and country club), and the three Sunday services, which were the climax to the mission. (For at that time those in the fifteen strong fellowship only came from five homes in Tollerton, including the Rectory). But hundreds of people came, and according to Ian some 42 people said they had echoed his prayer of commitment to Christ: 'Lord Jesus, I give you my whole life now; come into my heart; take away all my sin; fill me with your Spirit; and don't ever leave me.' Some were children, some were members of other churches, some lived right outside the area. The final service brought tears to many an eye as people came forward to the chancel to declare their new allegiance. Their responses were a mixture of reaffirmations of faith, straightforward enquiries, and genuine conversions, including even outright denial by one man the following day. But of this we knew for sure: at least 12 local adults had truly begun a new life in Christ, and through them came the emergence of a new church.

Here are just some of the comments made soon afterwards by those who made a response that week.

"I have been a regular church 'goer' for many years, but Ian Knox's words at the Parish Mission triggered off within me a stronger realisation of God's presence and, in so doing, has enabled me to see his goodness and love in many events in my life including unpleasant ones. I now feel more at peace with myself."

"I have felt different ever since, better able to cope with my pain, conscious of the living presence of Christ, and having a real hope for the future I have never known before."

"Until November 1983 I used to sit on the fence, so to speak, as regards my Christian faith. Then hearing Ian Knox talk on several occasions the message came to me that to be a Christian one did not have to know the Bible and all its meanings, but that came as one grew up into the Christian family."

"The message that Christ left for his people on earth came alive for me during the mission of Ian Knox in Tollerton Parish. This has since filled me with a deeper and more abiding faith."

"As I look back over the last three months, the amazing sequence of events I have experienced has convinced me that God's hand is on my life. He has shown me through the Bible and the witness of other Christians, particularly during Ian Knox's Mission, that we can have a new life through faith in Jesus Christ and all he has done for us. Through this faith I am being given strength to meet the pressures of today's rapidly changing world. 'I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me.'"

With Christmas events only weeks away, it was not the best time to follow up those who had responded during the parish mission, but each adult was visited, and invited to a meeting the following week, and all of those who came were incorporated into the house groups straightaway to study a basic course: New Life with Jesus Christ. Very soon they were playing a full part in the life of the church, getting onto the Parochial Church Council, and engaging in door to door visiting as part of the Diocesan Centenary distribution of Luke's Gospels. So we had waited 'one more year' and God had blessed us abundantly with a lovely group of (mostly) young and enthusiastic believers. We were now in a position

to start building the church on firm biblical foundations with people who wanted to go on with Christ,

Writing two months after that mission, Ian Knox penned these words of encouragement. "I've been thanking God for the marvellous time spent with you in November last year. I've been praying for all those lovely people who trusted Christ, either for the first time or by way of recommitment of their lives to him. This is just a brief letter to let you know that you are in my prayers, and to ask you to pass on my greetings to all my friends in Tollerton. If they were those who laboured with us for the salvation of souls, may they continue steadfastly in the faith. If they were those who came to know Christ, may they grow up in all things unto him. If they were those who rededicated their lives, may they press on towards the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus, To you, my love and prayers for a tremendous 1984, filled with blessings from our great God."

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **BUILDING THE CHURCH (1984)**

1984 (the year of supposed Orwellian nightmares, when the truth would be concealed from us, and of Aldous Huxley's equally chilling Brave New World, when the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance, as Neil Postman put it) will be remembered for many reasons. In our own diocese of Southwell, it was the year of centenary celebrations, which included widespread distribution of Good News for Nottinghamshire told by Luke. Wider afield, it was the year of Mission England with the fruitful harvest of Billy Graham's ministry. It was also the year that God spoke into the disobedience of the Church of England, when, less than three days after David Jenkin's consecration, York Minster was set ablaze by an act of God. But to many in Tollerton church, it was a year in which we saw strong foundations being laid for the newly planted fledgling church, and new initiatives being undertaken.

#### **MIDWEEK FELLOWSHIP**

When we arrived in Tollerton it was our vision to see a Christian home in every street and a growing number of house groups meeting weekly in various homes in the parish. Whilst we maintained a weekly midweek fellowship from the start, it was not until 1983 that regular attendance doubled to an average of 15 in June, leading to the formation of two house groups (alternating with central meetings). After the parish mission, numbers edged towards 30, so we formed three house groups (still alternating with central meetings) at the start of 1984. By now the fellowship came from some dozen homes in the parish. We were slowly on our way towards realising the 1981 PCC's vision of seeing the formation by mid 1984 of "4 or 5 geographically dispersed home groups for the purposes of teaching, worship, prayer, fellowship, pastoral care and evangelism".

Midweek meetings were still kept under tight control, with regular monthly house group leaders meetings, and a single programme of instruction. The sequel to 'New Life with Jesus Christ' was 'Growing in Knowing Jesus', and this CPO material was much appreciated by house group members, and used also at central meetings. The pattern of alternating in home groups and centrally proved to be a wise decision, for it meant that we grew together at the same pace and the younger Christians were able to receive the foundational teaching they needed, able to contribute easily in the smaller units, and able to receive deeper teaching in the larger gathering. At the same time by meeting centrally we could develop as a fellowship charismatically, and enter fully into the many new songs spawned by the renewal movement and be encouraged to exercise spiritual gifts. (Some of the songs were beginning to be introduced in the Sunday morning services).

Letting the Spirit have his way and letting the word of God dwell in us richly are both important for a balanced Christian life, and we sought to maintain this balance in our teaching. It was my concern that those in our fellowship should be people of the word and people of the Spirit. And we began to see this happening.

The autumn saw a healthy development towards becoming people of the word: coming to grips with Mark's Gospel, For some six months I began an expository

series of sermons on the whole of Mark (inspired by the example of Dick Lucas, who had developed a Read Mark Learn course in London) and the house groups drew out the practical application of what had been taught Sunday by Sunday. This was an immensely valuable time, and many appreciated digging deep into Scripture, which is after all the bedrock of our faith.

It was becoming important to me that we should as a church be doing God's word, not simply studying it, and this had important implications for the way we operated as a church. That same autumn at central fellowship I starting addressing the theme of Restoring God's Rule in his Church, in the areas of letting the Spirit have his way among us, the development of charismatic worship not simply in the midweek 'church within a church' but on a Sunday, the value of the Ephesians Four ministries for developing every-member ministry, reaching unity in the faith, maturity in knowledge and experience and stability in practice, instruction on authority, submission, and discipline, the role of women's ministry in the church, and seeing the church fulfil its destiny: to become a pure bride ready for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom and the restoration of all things. These were foundational matters that needed attention for the building up of the church in Tollerton.

Some of these issues had been impressed upon me, partly by reading the Bible, partly from books and magazine articles of 'restoration' provenance, and partly by the expository preaching and inspired teaching received at Downs Bible Weeks, held in Sussex each summer on Plumpton Race Course.<sup>1</sup> We had been going there as a family for a couple of years, and in due course quite a number from Tollerton made this their annual pilgrimage for several years to come, to the immense benefit of our church.

At this stage it had been my concern to see how we could implement some of the things we had been taught there within an Anglican setting. I emphasise some, for it wasn't that we wished to take everything on board in relation to the Restoration Movement. After all, the principles we were learning came directly from Scripture, not the Restoration Movement, and we were seeing in Scripture some (not all) of the things Restoration people do. And much besides, that Restoration churches were not doing, that Anglicans hold dear<sup>2</sup>.

It did not take us long to see how we could apply restoration principles in the parish, and how we could be helped in doing so. In a way, it took the fire at York Minster to show us the way! And the response from an increasingly famous incumbent from Essex.

## PRAYER

Meanwhile other changes were happening in the parish. The all-importance of corporate prayer had never been in doubt, but we were beginning to see it take on a higher priority. Prayer triplets, which had begun for us in the lead-up to the parish mission in 1983, continued unabated. With Mission England there was a renewed call to pray for the Billy Graham meetings at Aston Villa, which many in our church attended. Prayer also began to be an integral part of PCC gatherings, given them a whole new feel, and making it easier to address and resolve important issues. (Come April 86, following a weekend with Vijay Menon, we were encouraged to spend even more time in prayer at PCCs). Some in the fellowship had been greatly challenged by the World Literature Crusade 'Journey of Power' course on prayer prior to the Knox mission and entered into a deeper personal commitment to pray. There was a greater freedom in prayer at the midweek meetings. This was a welcome advance.

## **LEADING CHILDREN'S WORK**

One important issue was the running of children's work. We felt it important that 'Sunday School' should be led by those who were not only Christians themselves and apt to teach, but were also really part of the worshipping community and free to attend evening services when teaching in the morning. This meant keeping Sunday School to twice a month. We also felt it important that the children should be seen to be part of today's church, not simply the church of the future. Whilst much more would be done for the young people in the coming years, already the welfare of the children was being taken seriously, young people's work was being co-ordinated at the highest level, and each year in September Sunday School teachers, who were receiving training, were being commissioned at family service for their service amongst the young.

## **CEPHAS**

During 1984 the church was also taking on a greater profile in the community. There was door to door visiting, not only with Luke's Gospels (and selected invitation? to hear Billy Graham in Birmingham) but also with the distribution to every home of a new publication (replacing the old church magazine, Tollerton News) called Cephas. This was a well produced, colourful free-for-all giving news and views from St. Peter's Church, with interesting articles, testimonies and accounts of what God was up to in the church. It was well received, and gave church members a good opportunity to make contacts and to be noticed as Christians. It was published at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. But by 1986 it had served its purpose, and no longer having an editor, and with the Parish Council then producing its own Tollerton Newsletter free to every home, the cost of producing Cephas was channelled into evangelism instead.

Although we were seeing many encouragements from those new in the church in 1984, and many new people coming to our Sunday services, we were beginning to see a gradual falling away by the traditionalists. This was so even in the early morning communion services and at evening prayer, both traditional, mainly 1662, services which were largely unaffected by the now significant changes that were taking place at 10,30 am family worship. Whatever their reasons for leaving, it certainly had the effect that the 'church within the church' became the new church, and what had been preached and taught openly could begin to be put into practice in the life of the church with relative ease.

As our midweek fellowship grew steadily stronger, there were even overtures that year from a baptist fellowship in the next village attempting to woo some of our members into their fold. It was a mistake on their part, readily acknowledged by their minister, but the fact that no-one of our fellowship left us was proof that we were getting our act together and those who had joined us from round about were really part of us now.

## **ABWON**

Whilst the true church was being built up locally, there were forces at work within the Church of England at large that were threatening its very foundations. I had already sensed that the anglican evangelical constituency (as evidenced in recent Church of England Newspaper correspondence, evangelical theological journals, the Eclectic Society, theological colleges and Diocesan Evangelical Fellowships) seemed to be increasingly reluctant to bow to the authority of Scripture. And men like David Samuel of Church Society, prepared to uphold

biblical certainties, were few and far between.

I observed that many involved in renewal in our diocese had little time or taste for expository preaching; indeed there was a need much further afield for charismatics to come back to Scripture, and for there to be a proper balance of Word and Spirit.

Outside the evangelical, charismatic community, there was clearly serious theological and moral confusion, with the divinity of Christ denied, and homosexual practice and adultery condoned. It was in many ways embarrassing to belong to the established church. The newly appointed Bishop of Durham was pouring scorn on the Bible and casting doubt on the virginal conception and bodily resurrection of Christ.

So it was with some relief that I received, along with 11,000 other parish clergy, a letter from an Essex Rector, Tony Higton, who had just set up with the backing of his church in Hawkehill, ABWON, Action for Biblical Witness to our Nation. His concern was to call the church back to its agreed, legal basis of faith which states Scripture is our supreme authority under God. True Anglicanism regards the Bible as the Word of God which we are duty bound to convey to the nation. Only in this way can we win the nation for Christ. It was also clear from his letter that he was a charismatic.

It so happened that I knew him vaguely from theological college days, so, being reminded of him, I invited him up to Tollerton to lead a weekend of evangelism and renewal. He readily agreed to come, along with a team from his parish, for the last weekend of January 1985.

It so happened that his cousin, Marian, was a member of our congregation, and, receiving, as she did from time to time, information from Hawkehill, she remarked to my wife that what I had been teaching was very similar to what Tony had been teaching. I was given some tapes from a leaders conference in Hawkehill, and as we heard them there grew an increasing excitement within me to know that here was someone with whom I could readily identify. It sounded almost too good to be true. Was there really another anglican clergyman thinking as I thought? Was there really a parish church entering into the very things I longed to see happening in Tollerton? The more I heard, the more I was convinced that the things we had been receiving from the house church movement in Brighton and Basingstoke could happen and did happen in an Anglican setting. We awaited the New Year with great expectation. It proved to be the most significant weekend since the parish mission, but with very different results.

#### NOTES:

1, These were organised by Coastlands (later called New Frontiers International) headed by Terry Virgo, Team Leader of Clarendon Church in Hove, where my brother-in-law, Dave Fellingham, the songwriter, was an elder

2. Tony Higton and Gilbert Kirby have written a perceptive critique of the house church movement in Latimer Studies 27 *'The Challenge of the Housechurches'*. Paul Bunday has written a helpful booklet *'The New Churches - bane or blessing?'* available from Salisbury Diocese. James Steven has written a Grove Worship Series No 110 on 'Worship in the Restoration Movement.'



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### RESTORING THE CHURCH (I) (1985-1986)

We had celebrated God's Greatest Gift at Christmas. But now, well into January, we began to discover there was another gift God had for us, God's special gift to the Church of England, in the person of Tony Higton. It would take a few years before his impact would be appreciated further afield, but we were privileged to start unwrapping the gift early on and to enjoy the benefits of his Christ-centred, Godhonouring, Spirit-releasing ministry.

His visit and that of his team from Emmanuel, Hawkwell, marked an important turning point in the life of our church and in ourselves. The church warmly received the Hawkwell team and their ministry. Some came to clear faith, others were healed, others came to repentance. There were none of the hassles we normally associated with team visits. We were blessed. We were challenged. We were envisioned. The message "Stop playing church; start being church" rang loud and clear. We were greatly encouraged.

That weekend visit could not have come at a more opportune time for me personally. We had been in Tollerton nearly five years, in the kind of parish one eminent preacher had described to us as a spiritual graveyard. (Young people locally even called one of its streets 'Skeleton' Avenue!) But we had seen new life springing up from the grave, precious souls won for Christ, and an emerging fellowship of born again believers who loved God's Word and were open to the Spirit. There was in fact much to encourage us, and many a rural vicar would have been glad to have had what we had, without the hassle. For this harvest had not been won without great personal cost.

Battles had been fought, stands taken, and ground gained for God's kingdom and his righteousness. God was building his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. But I was getting damaged and battle scarred. People whom we had loved had left the church; others, it seemed, were likely to follow. This had left its mark on me. I was being worn down, worn down by the attacks of those who had left the church or been influenced by the same, worn down too by the lack of support of the Anglican hierarchy. (That particular night, incidentally, was the occasion of the farewell of our retiring Diocesan Bishop, who had been unwilling in correspondence to declare his belief in the virginal conception and bodily resurrection of our Lord. Increasingly disenchanted with the Church of England, I was in two minds whether to leave it. Certainly I was wondering whether we ought not to move on. And yet it did seem possible that the best of what I had witnessed in the restoration churches could become ours, even though it might mean further hassles on the way. And the Hawkwell visit encouraged me to stay on and see things through. What I was looking for could happen in an Anglican and village context.

Tony and Patricia took us aside at the end of their visit. They were impressed that we had stuck at it for so long. They could see the fruit of our labour. They appreciated what it had cost us so far, and were convinced that were we to leave, all our good effort might go to waste. We had burned our boats. We had made our stand in the parish and in the diocese. We would do well to lead the church on into restoration. Sensing the hurts I had incurred in the course of my ministry, they prayed for my healing, praying especially that my hurts would not stop me pursuing our goal to see the church restored to biblical principles in the

power of the Spirit. As a result I could echo Danny Daniel's song<sup>1</sup> written that same year:

"I am a wounded soldier but I will not leave the fight  
because the Great Physician is healin' me.  
So I'm etandin' in the battle, in the armour of His light;  
because His mighty power is real in me.  
I am loved, I am accepted by the Saviour of my soul.  
I am loved, I am accepted and my wounds will be made whole."

### HAWKWELL

To help us onward, the Higtos invited us as a family to stay in Hawkwell for a week to see at first hand the life and ministry of the church there and to discover what we might be able to introduce to St. Peter's Tollerton. We went the following month, and, in the words of the Queen of Sheba,<sup>2</sup> "I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me."

I was impressed by the love, unity and loyalty of their church, the clear vision to which it was committed, the biblical balance of word and Spirit in its worship, and the deep concern to reach out with the Gospel. I was reminded of a comment that someone expressed about our church a few years back: "Get love and unity right and everything else will fall into place". But hers was a sentimental love and a superficial political unity. But the love I saw there wasn't sentimental but willing to administer discipline; the unity wasn't at the expense of truth, nothing shallow, and hard to penetrate; not a closed clique either, but rather "an undivided army ready for battle". And behind it all the commitment to prayer, especially in the prayer cells. They say I didn't show it at the time, but in my heart I was thrilled at what I saw, and excited to believe that something like this could happen even at Tollerton!

Before we left, we had a helpful time with Tony and Patricia talking through how our church might be helped into restoration. We'd been given a check list the night before to prepare us. My heart's desire was to see the features of ministry listed there becoming more effectively worked out in my ministry, especially that our church might become a completely united fellowship (an undivided army ready for battle), committed to a united vision similar to Hawkwell's, and aiming to reach out more effectively with the love of God to the whole parish and beyond, and eventually to share the principles of restoration with churches outside our immediate patch. How were we to get started?

First, we were given various '**prophetic words**' and, in particular, a picture from one of the prayer cell members in Hawkwell of a group of people in a circle all facing toward the centre, that is looking towards the Lord Jesus, but there seemed to be a distance between them, almost an uncertainty. The picture went on to show them being drawn inwards until they formed a tight close-knit group. Then they were able to turn outwards and began moving outwards, but the gaps were immediately filled by more people and the circle remained intact.

Secondly, we were assured of **prayer backing** by one of the housegroups, and of anticipated visits by the Higtos whose family lived nearby. In any case we were assured they were at the other end of the phone whenever needed. This proved most helpful.

Thirdly, we received a suggested **fivefold plan of action**:

- a) To report on our visit to the FCC

- b) To set up a small nucleus of key people who were behind us to pray through the implications of what we were to share.
- c) When the time was right, the nucleus were to study the Commitment course with us.
- d) Through them we were to introduce the course to the rest of the fellowship.
- e) Lastly we would set up Housegroups for those who would commit themselves to the Vision.

How did it work out in practice? Amazingly well!

### **WORKING OUT THE PLAN**

**Plan a).** On our return I reported on our stay in Hawkwell, and according to the PCC minutes, my main impression had been "the tremendous unity of heart and mind displayed by the fellowship there and their trust in their leaders. The church was also biblically based and completely guided by the Holy Spirit." I described the steps by which a newcomer entered the church attending services, joining the faith sharing group. then a commitment group, and once committed to the vision, joining an area housegroup and prayer cell. I explained their leadership structure. And I said there would be an opportunity in October for our own leaders to spend a weekend at Hawkwell. I think my enthusiasm engendered a favourable, if measured reaction. All PCC members by now were born again believers, and many of them experiencing renewal. My report was an appetizer, though I knew one or two might raise objections in due course.

**Plan b).** Over the next few days we confidentially approached those whom we felt were 'one in heart and mind' with us; shared the Hawkwell vision with them, the importance of being an undivided army ready for battle etc., asking whether they would be willing to meet, say, fortnightly (additional to the normal midweek meeting), to see how best to lead our church into restoration, enter more fully and freely into renewal ourselves, and listen to the Lord as to where we were at and what we were seeking to move into (In this the Lydia Fellowship prayer cell cards were of great help).

So we began our nucleus group in March '85 with 3 people (besides ourselves], gradually increasing to 9 by May, concentrating mainly on developing our relationship with each other, experimenting with gifts of the Spirit, and praying in-depth for key people in the church, both those who might hinder the programme of restoration (some of whom quickly left) and those whom we felt should join our nucleus prayer cell. The Lord graciously gave us several pictures' and 'words' of encouragement during those early weeks. We kept in regular touch with the Hawkwell housegroup and with the Higtens.

**Plan c).** In May, Tony visited our nucleus group, and we were encouraged to get started on the Commitment course, which we began in May (4 months earlier than we'd originally expected). We basically used the old Hawkwell Commitment Course (part Two) with minor editorial amendments and additions. Much of its content had already been taught before our links with Hawkwell. It was enthusiastically received.

By this time Chris and I had approached most of the fellowship individually, sharing the vision and explaining why we had selected a nucleus, that it was

going through the commitment course, and that later in the year the whole fellowship would be led through it.

Meanwhile, teaching on restoration themes was given to the whole church on Sundays and to the midweek central fellowship, and housegroups were being encouraged into renewed worship and spiritual gifts (the nucleus acting as a useful catalyst). Services started getting longer as we allowed more time for informal worship on Sunday mornings!

In July, I spent two days in Hawkwell receiving prayer counselling (Chris went at a later stage) - a particularly valuable exercise that set me free from a spirit of insularity that has dogged my life from childhood. Psalm 18: 19 meant a lot to me: *"He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me."* The whole experience for both of us has been immensely helpful as we have ourselves sought to engage in prayer counselling<sup>3</sup> within our fellowship, and beyond.

In September we hosted a Day of Repentance, Prayer and Fasting. And the following month our leaders attended the Leaders weekend conference here at Hawkwell.

**Plan d).** In November we had Tony and the Team up to lead a weekend in Tollerton, an immensely valuable time. The nucleus had just completed the commitment course, and the whole fellowship were just beginning it. The weekend served well to envision us about commitment to a united vision and to allay fears.

To allay the fears of any readers who might suppose we had come under the authority of another church outside our diocese or under the apostleship of someone other than our diocesan Bishop, it is worth mentioning that at no time were we in submission to a housechurch type 'covering' ministry. The Hawkwell link was purely a voluntary association. Tony and Patricia Highton had no authority in our fellowship, nor did they seek any. But it was invaluable to us to be able to consult with them, and allow them to speak wisdom into our situation, and come to our aid when we needed it. At that time we were the first church outside their immediate area to forge a temporary link with them, and it was conveniently close to Tony's parental home for more frequent visits. In some ways we served as a guinea-pig for what was to become a wider programme serving well over a hundred churches worldwide. In no way could they maintain such extensive contacts elsewhere, though they still try to make themselves available when asked. In these days it is the prayer link that so many churches find valuable. So all the Hawkwell involvement in Tollerton took place in response to our desire for help. Most courses produced for churches do not have any practical back-up. In the case of our parish commitment course, as it was then known, we knew we could call upon the resources of Tony and his church, and we did.

During that particular November weekend, it was confirmed that spiritual warfare over the church was needed; we had anticipated this ourselves, concerned about the unhelpful heraldic hatchments in the church and a sense of death surrounding it, linked with 19th century squires; the team felt symptoms of tiredness, the inability to sing "Jesus we enthrone you"; various pictures, words of knowledge etc. were shared, and the word 'feudalism'. As a result of the cutting-off ministry that followed, people immediately observed a change in the atmosphere. At the next PCC further deliverance ministry was exercised by ourselves in relation to past blasphemy affecting the finances.

Also at that weekend, the penny dropped for me that a worship leader (for which we sought) need not be a musician! Though it clearly helps if he or she is musical. We sensed that one couple seemed ideally suited to lead worship, and to stimulate creative worship in the life of the church in music, movement, art and drama. It so transpired that they also felt this could be their way forward into giving more time for the Lord. We encouraged them to begin in the New Year for a trial period. Once completing the commitment course, they continued to lead our worship for a couple of years. This was a real breakthrough.

Celebrations once a month at evening services were introduced in the New Year. We desperately needed musicians to aid the flow of our worship. Our organist left almost immediately, so I had to step in myself. We were determined to provide an atmosphere of worship, and to allow spiritual gifts to develop in our services.

During the period from Nov '85 to Easter '86, four things happened:

- 1) The **Commitment Groups** flourished.
- 2) Those in the nucleus now practiced being a **Leaders Fellowship**:
  - i) They oversaw the progress of the Commitment Groups;
  - ii) They considered matters of discipline coming to surface (that might have been better dealt with by corporate eldership);
  - iii) They looked ahead to the formation of Housegroups and Prayer Cells;
  - iv) They engaged in discerning each other's spiritual gifts;
  - v) They prayed through problems facing the church. It was a real breakthrough one evening, after having discerned some people's gifts, and then having to tackle a particular pastoral problem, not to have to spend ages discussing the issue, but instead to use the gifts just discerned and hear a clear word of the Lord into the matter needing attention.
- 3) All who were considering commitment were taken through **the 'Yellow Peril'**, a comprehensive occult and psychic check list, and prayer counselled where necessary.
- 4) In March, the PCC unanimously approved a paper on committed membership and agreed to introduce the concept of **committed membership** with effect from Easter Day 1986 (all the PCC by this stage intent on becoming committed members), to the end that the church be built up and the lost saved. New housegroups would be set up for committed members, and provision made for those not ready or willing for commitment, and it was understood that all those appointed to any leadership in the parish should be filled with the Spirit and wholeheartedly committed to the Vision that God was revealing to us as a church and calling us to obey.

**Plan e).** So it was that on Easter Day we included in our Family Communion a **service of commitment**, giving opportunity for those who had been through the commitment course to make their commitment publicly. The concept of committed membership was thus well and truly inaugurated. And after Easter, the five-fold plan of 15 months previous was fully operational. The newly committed were invited into two area **housegroups**, and many of them also joined a **prayer cell**.

NOTE:

1. I am a wounded soldier written by Danny Daniels © Mercy Publishing! Thankyou Music 1985,

2. 1 Kings 10:7.
3. Mary Pytches lists in her book *'Yesterday's Child'* (Hodders) a list of counselling services. We have followed the method of 'Wholeness Through Christ'.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **RESTORING THE CHURCH (II) (1986-1987)**

Easter '86 marked an historic turning point in the life of the church, with the establishing of the concept of committed membership. In those days "all the believers were one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32) and "they all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). This was the mark of normal church life in the NT; and this was our aim, to be a truly committed fellowship, one in heart and mind. We wanted to be the answer to Jesus' prayer "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me... May they be one as we are one... May they be brought to complete unity" (Jn 17:21-23). It wasn't that we were consumed with being a cosy exclusive fellowship; far from it. We were equally committed constantly to reach out in love to bring others into our fellowship, as in the picture given us at Hawkwell the year before. But we recognised that we could not reach out effectively with the love of God to the parish or beyond if we were not a completely united, deeply committed fellowship. We were reminded over Easter of how important it was to "stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose."

Whilst we wanted to echo the twin heartbeat of God - to build the church and save the lost - a theme that had grabbed us at the previous Downs Bible Week - the main emphasis during the rest of 1985 was to establish the new ground rules for the church to operate effectively according to restoration principles. There were some who were raring to get on with high profile evangelistic endeavours in the village, but it was important first to consolidate and build into the life of our fellowship various aspects of the vision; there were still a number of matters needing attention (phases of development as they were later to be called), in order that the entire ministry of the church be carried out by a united membership, using their varied gifts and ministries in practical, pastoral, evangelistic and other work to glorify God, build up the Body and reach out to the world.

In many ways it was a most exciting period, holding forth high hopes of kingdom advance, but it was an exacting time, and we were warned it would not be plain sailing. Within a fortnight of Easter we received this timely word from God:

"Brace yourself for the battle. It will be hard and long. I am your armour bearer. I clothe you with my armour that will deflect all the attacks of the enemy. You are a strong people. Stand firm in my name for I will use you mightily to combat the works of the enemy. Look for me throughout the battle for I am the great warrior who has won the battle. There will be those who mock and doubt your standing as My precious people in this place. But stand firm, My children, do not waver to the right or the left, and see My hand defeat your foes before your eyes."

### **MINISTRY GROUPS**

We began by setting up two area house groups for those who had been through the Commitment Course and were now committed to the Vision, each group with a growing pastoral responsibility for non-house group members of the congregation living in their area of the parish, and each with a practical

responsibility alternate weeks to carry out the Sunday tasks of welcoming, reading lessons, leading prayers, etc. We met as a Central Fellowship once a month (open to anyone in the congregation), and on the remaining three Tuesdays, the focus was either on Teaching and Fellowship, Fellowship and Intercession, or Outreach! Evangelism (this initially open to outsiders also). Early on, the gifts and ministries of each house group member were discerned (often linked with a quiet day set aside for prayer and fasting), and various people were appointed in each group to serve as host, teacher, pastor, intercessor, administrator, evangelist etc., not doing it all themselves, but responsible for these functions being carried out. In retrospect, people tended to be over generous in their discerning of charismatic gifts, and what gifts were discerned were not always channelled into appropriate ministries. But we were going through an experimental phase and had much to learn. In retrospect, it might have been more helpful had we referred to the groups not as 'mini churches' but rather as 'ministry' groups, for that is what we were really after, a group of people committed to ministry.

In addition we wanted to make provision for a new commitment group for newcomers to the church. To begin with we found that the demand for it was never sufficient to merit a group, so we did it ourselves on a one to one basis, costly in time, but it did mean we could channel new folk quickly through the course and into the house groups, including one couple who would eventually become leaders of a commitment group.

### **PRAYER CELLS**

In addition to the creation of the two area house groups for the committed was the formation of our first three prayer cells. These operated along the lines of a Lydia Prayer cell, but were specifically related to the life of the local church.

A group of men concentrated on outreach and spiritual warfare, often meeting in the open air early on a Tuesday morning. During the first year they felt it important to pray against the prevalent gossip and spiritual resistance in the village and to discern specific areas of darkness that were holding back the light of Christ. It was not until much later that the discovery was made that people had been involved in witchcraft and occult activities at the social centre of the village. And it was a real privilege for the group to be invited one morning to deliver the building (which from the air was in a cruciform shape) from the powers of evil, in the name of Jesus. This led to a significant change in atmosphere in that place. The group regularly prayed for people to move into the village who were either Christians or open to the gospel. Furthermore they prayed through forthcoming evangelistic events, some of which were particularly strategic, such as our Cephas Street Theatre at the Scouts harvest fayre, and the events marking the opening of the Church Centre.

There were two ladies groups to begin with (others later covered the concerns of Young Church; also the Church's Ministry among the Jews and Intercessors for Britain). One focused on healing. The other prayed through the outworking of restoration principles, which in turn meant praying about the future of our church outbuildings.

### **CHURCH CENTRE**

It had been evident for a long while that something needed to be done about the Rectory Rooms (once the tithe barn and stable block). They were in a bad state of repair and ill-suited to the needs of the church. There were considerable hurdles to overcome and much need for concentrated prayer to discern the



Lord's will. In due course permission was given to remove the stable block, and services provided by Family First Trust to renovate the rest of the buildings. At every stage we met with problems, as is often the case with very old buildings, and every problem added to the cost. But the prayer cell were instrumental in seeing substantial progress made.

They also received a clear vision of what the plant would be used for in the future, as a place for fellowship, teaching, children's work and evangelism, and all for God's glory. It would be called St. Peter's Church Centre, and be clearly marked as such.

Two events will be indelibly associated with those days. First the **Gift Day**. The Church Council had for some time been discussing work on the outbuildings, but we kept hitting snags in relation to grants and workers. Then quite out of the blue Family First Trust (an Manpower Services Commission sponsored group) offered their services, free of charge. They would be starting in August, just a month away. Estimates oscillated and escalated, but it was obvious we could not proceed without money, at least £4000 for starters. The leaders fellowship felt it best to look to the church fellowship for this amount, and with just a fortnight's notice we held a night of prayer and fasting, and the gift day realised £5233. As costs mounted beyond £8000, another gift day was held later in the year, and we were able to see the new building renovated and refurbished, free of debt.

Secondly, there was the **Open Week** of the new Church Centre in December 1985 (preceded by an evening of prayer and fasting). This involved an energetic week of evangelistic activities, a fun day for children, a film night for teenagers, a lunch for the elderly, a buffet to which civic leaders were invited to hear J John, and a service for all on the Sunday. On every occasion, we had a guest speaker who shared the gospel. We were pleased at the large numbers from the village who attended, who were pleasantly surprised at what they saw, if a little nonplussed by what they heard.

It was quite amazing the building was ready in time for the opening. Delay seemed the order of the day. But God had given us two assurances: Isaiah 49:17 - the builders will build; and Isaiah 66:9 Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery? We were tested to the last moment, with blocked drains, but in answer to prayer God resolved our problems and provided a lovely building. We shared how this had come about, invited our guests to share in our joy, to hear more about the God behind it all, and to discover for themselves that joy we had found in Christ.

We were disappointed that Michael Whinney, our new 'charismatic' Bishop, could not be with us for the official opening (due to an illness that soon led to his retirement), and that so few outsiders came on the Sunday. And to be honest we were disappointed that no-one came to faith, even through evangelist S John's ministry. Much effort and prayer had gone into the building venture, and we were highly expectant that God would move in a new way once the building was in use again. Much effort had gone into the Open Week itself, and, despite certain things going wrong, the gospel had been clearly presented, and testimonies shared. But there was no discernible harvest.

We could easily have become despondent. Some were. More were tempted to be. Many of us were exhausted. But we knew there were lessons we could learn from it all, not least the need to build on the contacts with those who had attended, and to really befriend those whom we wanted to win for the Lord. These were lessons that many took a long time to learn.

The more we sought to restructure the church along restoration lines, the more

distinctive the church became in the eyes of others. For a number of years we regarded ourselves as evangelicals (gospel and Bible people) and charismatics (open to the dynamic and directives of the Spirit). We were even happy, at that time, to call ourselves restorationists, in the sense that we sought to restore the church to biblical principles in the power of the Spirit. It was in hindsight a misleading and unhelpful term, though we knew what we meant by being 'into restoration' and into the recovery of certain biblical emphases. It was not surprising, especially in a village context, that church members received the usual brickbats: belonging to the God Squad, Bible thumpers, members of the Hallelujah handshake brigade, and so on. Some also suspected us of belonging to an exclusive, even sectarian group.

### **CREATIVE WORSHIP**

People certainly sensed that there was something different about their parish church. Of those who ventured into our Sunday worship gatherings, there was no doubt newcomers experienced a family atmosphere with a warm, friendly welcome. They would find the services easy to follow, if a little unfamiliar. There was plenty of joy and laughter, and many signs of life, especially when the children were present. The banners added colour. We had much to celebrate, and there was a real party atmosphere at times. Although we basically followed the Anglican liturgy, we included a lot of modern songs, some of them lively and exuberant, others quieter and more prayerful. Sometimes the message was conveyed through Movement and Drama. Sometimes God spoke through gifts of the Spirit. There were testimonies. And there were opportunities for prayer ministry after the morning service. We had introduced a monthly Celebration on a Sunday evening, and this gave opportunities for even more unrestrained worship, the exercise of spiritual gifts and a developing healing ministry, though we never missed out on expository preaching.

There was little doubt that things had changed a great deal from the early days. And outsiders or irregular worshippers knew there was something different there. One young person who visited us reported back to the vicar of his home church: in our church, we love the church; in their church, they love the Lord. And yes, indeed, it was our worship of the Lord, being lost in wonder love and praise, and our heartfelt commitment to the Lord, that made its mark upon those who came to church, attracting some, and creating unease in others. We were different, though people could not always fathom why. And at times, like Remembrance Sunday Parade Services or Christmas Christingle Services, when more outsiders were present, this difference was more pronounced, and sometimes misunderstood, as if we really preferred not to have anything to do with those outside our group.

The opening of the Church Centre marked a new phase in being a distinctive community. The old buildings had come to be regarded as almost belonging to the village, harking back to days when there was little distinction between church and village. From now on, the Church Centre was clearly seen as belonging to the church, with church related activities having prior use of the facilities. It would still be used by the wider community, such as the Playgroup, but some took umbrage that they had not been consulted, that they had not been involved in the restoration plans, and that the church itself had entirely paid for it all, and that they had not been asked to contribute, even to the meal celebrating its opening. (In fact, much consultation had gone on in past years with users of the buildings and with the Parish council, albeit with no resolution. It was only when the church took the bull by the horns and got down to intercessory prayer that God's provision happened with relative speed through the direct and sacrificial giving of God's people.) What the Open Week did make

clear was that our church had to be reckoned with. Many had thought we were a played out force, having heard rumours of people leaving, yet knowing nothing of the new life that had been emerging in the meantime. But God had now raised up a church that was living according to biblical principles, and that marked us out as different.

We were not only a church distinct from the village community, but a church totally different from the only other church' in the village, the Methodist Church.

## **METHODISTS**

Our relationship with the Methodists was wholly unlike what had been the case in my previous parish of Toton. There I had forged a growing closeness between our churches, leading eventually, after I left, to a covenant agreement. We enjoyed combined services, holiday special weeks for children, parish missions, neighbourhood groups and celebrations, and many of us were in agreement on the most important issues. From the first we had met together for prayer. The same could not be said in Tollerton.

Representatives from both churches used to meet twice a year to consider matters of mutual interest, This Christian Unity Group was mainly concerned with the Neighbourhood Scheme (a scheme in which street wardens welcomed newcomers to the parish with an activity leaflet), with Christian Aid events, with the annual Harvest Supper and the monthly United Services, The neighbourhood scheme had seen better days, wardens were increasingly hard to recruit and by 1986 none of these were members of our church. We had plans to make our own approach to newcomers with our own literature. Whilst there were some imaginative concerts arranged to raise money for Christian Aid, we were not entirely happy about supporting Christian Aid, and in any case were wholly committed to Tear Fund. We enjoyed some interesting harvest suppers together, alternating venues. Our concern was to reach more people and younger families, and use the occasion for the gospel's sake, and the methodists were none too keen to change the nature and purpose of them, which was basically a social event for the sake of the older folk. In due course we found these restrictions too prohibitive, and did our own thing.

As for the united services, again we found ourselves not at one in their purpose. Originally what happened was that once a month one church would close down its service to attend a normal service at the other church. In practice what happened was that just a few attended the other's service, and the Methodist minister went elsewhere in his circuit, when it was their turn to come to us. I had suggested that the visiting church's minister preached on these occasions. But the outcome was that fewer and fewer people enjoyed united services, our congregation found their services too traditional, theirs found ours too lively, and we grew increasingly apprehensive having a visiting minister whose preaching undermined, in our view, the authority of Scripture.

In the end the Methodist Church Council decided to end united services. It so happened that at that very time we had been thinking that the first Sunday evening in the month was the best time for us to hold our Celebrations, so the Methodist decision, although saddening, turned out to be an answer to prayer. The Methodist minister pointed out the irony that at the very time the BCC Lent initiative was bringing unity to the fore, our two churches were being guided apart. It was not for want of trying. But those representing the two churches on the Unity Group were poles apart in their thinking. Every time we pressed for joint evangelistic action or joint participation in fellowship groups or specially devised services, we met with resistance.

The upshot was that in February 1986 the Tollerton Christian Unity Group disbanded, but with the hope that in a year's time the two churches might meet to share successes and plans and rejoice in developments within each church. Such a meeting did take place in February 1987, just two months after the opening of the Church Centre. It was a relaxed event! Each church shared its vision, and the latest news and views.

The Methodists spoke of their plans for a church extension (to cater for their occasional special occasions, like civic services and school concerts, and to be the home of the Parish Council) and of their endless money-raising events. Then their minister shared some gleanings from John Wesley's sermon on 'The Catholic Spirit', based on 2 Kings 10:15. Wesley's use of that text seemed to me strangely out of context and I felt impelled to expound it 'properly' the following Sunday. But the sentiments expressed were apt for an occasion that recognised the difference between our two congregations (in my view more doctrinal and experiential than denominational).

Two quotes from James Holway's translation into modern English<sup>2</sup> of Wesley's sermon give us the nub of his message.

"A difference of opinion may prevent complete outward unity, but it need not prevent unity of spirit. We may not think alike, but we can agree to differ. All the children of God may unite despite small differences between them." The sermon concludes: "To summarise: Christians with a catholic spirit extend a hand to all those whose hearts agree with theirs. They praise God for their own orthodoxy, their scripturally-based worship and their membership of a Christian congregation. At the same time they love all who believe in Jesus whatever their beliefs or forms of worship, or whatever denomination they belong to. They regard their fellow-Christians as friends and brothers in the Lord, and they look forward to being with them in heaven. They pray for their fellow Christians and wish them well in everything they do. They help them in their material and spiritual welfare, even to the extent of dying for their sake if necessary."

Various Anglicans then shared both the developments of the previous year, how God had blessed them and blessed our links with Hawkwell, and the outworking of our vision. We majored on the unity of heart and mind we had come to have in our committed fellowship. We stressed the two poles of our vision: to build the church and save the lost. We told of how we had introduced the concept of committed membership, restructured the house groups and Young Church, developed the prayer cells, introduced creative worship, discerned people's gifts and ministries, begun in-depth prayer counselling through which the Lord brought inner healing and deliverance, and how we aimed at a biblical balance between authority, church discipline and personal freedom within the body of Christ. We were seeking for a definite experience of the power God promised through the Holy Spirit, and were prayerfully attempting to restore the church to biblical principles in the power of the Spirit.

As for saving the lost, we had a deep concern to reach out in love to those outside the church, seeking to show a consistent loving welcome to those who came to church and encouraging everyone into a deepening commitment to Christ. Through the introduction of clubs for Explorers, Pathfinders and Youthquake (our CYFA group), through Lunch Bunch for mums and toddlers, through regular house group open evenings, supper parties, guest services and enquirers groups, backed by prayer triplets and prayer cells, we aimed to seek and to save the lost. We also supported by our prayers and giving our mission partners across the world.

By the end of the evening, although everything had been shared with much graciousness, it was evident that our two churches were poles apart, and that there was little meeting of minds. We continued to enjoy good relations with other churches in the wider area, but for the time being the liberal stance of the Methodist leadership hindered joint enterprise in the short term.

Meanwhile we ploughed our separate furrow, looking to the day when God's Spirit would be poured out on both churches, and we could once again work in partnership in the service of the gospel.

Much had happened since our formal link with Hawkwell began; we still had a long way to go, but we believed that small though we were in numbers, albeit highly motivated and committed, we were a church more ready to receive new converts and better equipped to reach out with Christ's love to a community that recognised that God was doing a special thing at St. Peter's.

#### NOTES:

1. Phil 1:27,28.
2. Sermons on Several Occasions by The Reverend John Wesley, M. A. translated into Modern English by James D Holway (Moorley's Bible and Bookshop Ltd.).

## CHAPTER TEN

### OUTREACH IN THE CHURCH (1980-1990)

In July 1990, the Diocese of Southwell Jumped the Lambeth gun and at a marvellously packed service at the Minster on 1 July 1990 (one hundred years to the day after its first Bishop, George Ridding, initiated a series of triennial world mission conferences) Bishop Pat Harris inaugurated the Decade of Evangelism - with its logo: forward and outward, It is a tremendous inspiration to have a Bishop whose heart is in evangelism and mission, to have accredited evangelists working in the diocese, like J John and Alan Haskey, and to have a Diocesan Adviser in Evangelism who is also an evangelist. Many churches are beginning to put evangelism higher on their agendas, whatever they mean by 'evangelism', and the appointment of the new Archbishop Dr George Carey will ensure evangelism is not simply the preserve of evangelicals.

Evangelicals are gospel people, so it is no surprise that in seeking to establish an evangelical church in Tollerton, evangelism has been a high priority, and in many ways we have had a Decade of Evangelism, and if a little disappointed we have not seen greater advances for the kingdom, we are nevertheless immensely grateful to the Lord that in a rural village we have seen some 50 or more people truly converted and committed to the life of the church.

To be sure, from 1980-83, the work of evangelism largely centred on the Rectory, with us inviting the speaker and the hearers, and a few church members coming along to see how it was done. With so few believers around, following up the talks was difficult. And since there was no real 'church' to welcome people into, or suitable worship services to invite them to, it was hard to consolidate enquirers or the newly converted; some quickly lapsed. Come the Parish Mission<sup>1</sup>, a church was established, and new members were followed-up within the house groups. By 1986 services in church were Setting quite lively, and visitors could see the marks of NT Christianity in the worshippers, and witness the level of consistent commitment demanded of Christ's followers.

The expectation raised by the concept of committed membership, that, once we were one in heart and mind, and committed to a corporate vision, and the house groups had become mini-churches in the community, with gifts discerned and deployed, we would be better able to make an impact on the community with the love of Christ, led to disappointment when it was found people were not responding to the gospel quite as we had hoped. Much effort had gone into building up the church (with beneficial results), much effort had gone into mounting evangelistic events, much intercession had been made in prayer cells and in house groups, yet there was little evident reaping of the harvest.

Spiritual warfare had unearthed and overcome certain occult hindrances within the village itself and in the church's distant past. We had seen the power of feudalism broken. And with the help of the Hawkwell team, we had repented as a church of any wrong ways we had offended the village community, seeking before God to repair our witness and our relationships and to improve our image without in any way compromising the truth. Yet there remained a negative attitude towards the church by some of the older traditionalist element who no longer attended St. Peter's, and this rubbed off on those new to the village.

I remember well one Christian lady who had been referred to us by her previous

vicar, and had started coming along, who told us how she had been waylaid by someone in the village for almost an hour with an incessant list of things that were wrong with the church and its Rector. Fortunately, she had already met us, and could not believe the things that were said of me. In a very short time she became one of our most dependable and committed members. I can think of another lady, who had been recently bereaved, and would have quite liked to have come to church, but she had listened to negative gossip by neighbours and never came. It was not until a fortuitous visit by my wife inviting her to hear Billy Graham in the Meadows live link, that she was slowly drawn into the life of the church and later repented that she had believed the embittered things she had heard about the church rather than coming to see for herself the love and fellowship so much in evidence.

But we were finding a warmer, more positive, attitude by younger families, due in part to Lunch Bunch, the Barnabas Group, and the growing contact through our own children with their friends and families.

One of the glories of belonging to the established church is that normally there is a large group of people on the fringe of the church who are not yet believers, people who come to church because of baptisms, weddings or funerals, or simply attend because it is their parish church. In becoming more of a gathered and committed church our fringe had become almost non-existent. So it became essential not only for believers to invite friends along, but for the church to create a new fringe. This we began to do.

With the renovation of the Church Centre came the inauguration of Lunch Bunch, which was started in response to the social need for mums with small children to chat and meet together and for the children to be happily entertained. There was already a secular mums and toddlers group in the village. But this was to be different. It sought to provide a specifically Christian atmosphere, providing a forum where mums could share their need and Christians could get alongside them and share Jesus. It is very low-key, pre-evangelism, with the main emphasis on friendship. Lunch Bunch takes place weekly during term time, after the Playgroup is over. There is a light lunch provided at reasonable cost. Then the toddlers enjoy hearing a Christian story and participating in play rhymes and songs, whilst mums chat over coffee. Once a month a Christian speaker will address an issue of homely interest to young mums or share a testimony. The overall aim is to introduce mums to the love and salvation of Jesus, and bring them into his local worshipping family. There has often been a large turnout, at times stretching the resources and ingenuity of the helpers. It took a good year before we began to see some mums attending church (developing its fringe); yet others went to the Barnabas Group.

We had been meaning to form a Barnabas Group ever since Easter '86 to provide fellowship and ministry for Christians who did not yet want to be fully committed to our Vision, and basic Christian teaching and ministry for enquirers and new Christians. Eventually, September '88, God provided us with just the right people to lead it, generous in hospitality, apt to teach and wholly committed to our vision. Of those who first attended it (mainly using the Jesus - Then and Now videos), some started coming to church. In due course almost a different group of people were guided through the Commitment Course, to swell our committed membership. Within two years the leaders had left the area, and we had to start all over again, finding new leaders, reaching out to new people. But much good will was generated in the village.

The third area that encouraged a more positive attitude among younger families was through personal contacts through our children. I refer not to children generally in the church, for whom we had provided not only a flourishing

Young Church and Youth Clubs but also special Fun Days and Potted Sports Events and the like which increased our contact with non church-going parents, but to our own offspring. One of the parish 'traditions' we broke from the start was producing boys, for no boys had been born to the Rectory for many a generation, only girls. As they grew up, so our contacts with other families evolved.

On our arrival in Tollerton most of the congregation were well over fifty; indeed up until 1985/86 the average age was still high. Few children were being born to church families. Few were being born in the village. Because we had no children of our own to begin with, we could not easily relate to other families through their children. Our day-off coincided with the village mums and toddlers group, so we did not get involved there. I had some contact with the children at our local school, through taking assemblies for the older ones, though not with their parents. Then with a change of head teacher in late '86 I was even denied this privilege through the objection of one or two families who took exception to my teaching on the grounds of a remark taken out of context. I was beginning to become unpopular for my objections to Hallowe'en, and in the following year, when the school introduced, without parental warning, a Divali Festival, in which children were expected to sing songs of worship to Indian gods, church members became unpopular for withdrawing their children from it. It did not make matters easier.

During this period, some believers were knocked by negative criticism; others were disheartened by the apathy and lack of interest of non Christian contacts in village. Most were too busy in necessary church affairs to find time for village activities and making personal contacts, and even when they were released from certain responsibilities did not use the extra time for developing friendships. Befriending outsiders was one of our biggest weaknesses as a church. Working out the implications of our vision in relation to evangelism fostered some unrest and disease. And some were questioning whether they really had a heart for evangelism.

In the meantime our children were getting older, passing first through the Playgroup (headed for a while by one of our fellowship) then right up through the school. A new generation of parents was taking over from those who were antagonistic towards our ministry, and some church parents were involving themselves on the PTA. So through our contact with Lunch Bunch, Playgroup, and the school, friendships were being forged, and strengthened, and attitudes towards us and the church were changing.

Regardless what were the attitudes of outsiders or what were the hang-ups of insiders, the work of evangelism went on right through the Decade of the 1980s. We tried most things<sup>2</sup>, from Billy Graham, Big Top and Parish Missions to evangelistic weekends with guest speakers, from fun events for the family to special services linked with Christmas, Easter, Harvest, and Remembrance Sunday. We tried praise processions and street drama, devised a Circus Project<sup>3</sup>, and we had barbecues, pancake parties, strawberry and skittles evenings, roving suppers and buffet suppers galore. On most occasions the gospel has been clearly shared; at all times the conversation has turned on the things of Christ. The house groups have kept evangelism a high priority, holding open evenings one or twice a term, using questionnaires for door to door visitation, producing personal tracts (with the story of how Christ has met with them), and looking out for divine appointments. And since 1988 we have developed our own version of Good News Down the Street.

Our version of Good News Down the Street (whereby a team of three visit



someone's home for three or four weeks) is based almost entirely on Mark's Gospel, covering in a simple way who Jesus is, and why he came, and how we might respond to the risen Lord today. It often leads into a showing of the video, *Journey Into Life*. Those who come to faith will then be encouraged to go to join a nurture/discovery group, or go to Barnabas Group, or, if appropriate, make a start on the Commitment Course (Called to Serve), in preparation for becoming members of the house groups (or ministry groups).

Baptism may also be an appropriate response after coming to Christ in faith. If they have not been 'done' as infants, we encourage them to be baptised by immersion. This we normally do in the context of our morning service, but since we only have three fonts in church!, none of them big enough for immersion, we go out onto the Rectory lawn next door, where the candidates are baptised in a large paddling pool. It is a marvellous opportunity for witness to friends and relations.

We have also had opportunity to share the gospel, and to share the insights we have learned, as a church that has embraced committed membership, with other churches. We know others have come to faith through our teams sent out, and the teams themselves have been greatly blessed too.

No evangelism can be effective without prayer. Indeed even with it, we have been perplexed that we have not seen more fruit from our labours, Whole nights of prayer have been devoted to seeking reasons for the harvest being held back. Much prayer has been made in the prayer cells and house groups. We are still not sure whether we are doing things aright, but we know the work of evangelism must go on, and with it the need to love people and befriend them. The prophetic word given in March 1987 (based on Psalm 107) still grips many of us.

"My children, there are many wandering around in the desert. many who love Me, who are redeemed, yet have no home. They are crying to Me and you are the answer to their prayers. They will give thanks to Me because of you.

"Then there are many who rebelled against Me and their rebellion has caused them to stumble. They are crying to Me and you are the answer to their prayers. They will give thanks to Me because of you.

"Others are held in Satan's deep bondage, struggling against chains holding them so tightly. They are crying to Me and you are the answer to their prayer. And they, too, will thank Me because of you.

"My children, hidden behind the castles of materialism there are people who need Me. They have so much and thoughts of Me are far from them. I will cause storms to rock their secure world, so that they will cry to Me. Then you again will be the answer and they will give thanks to Me because of you.

"So give thanks to Me for My loving kindness endures for ever.

"Make yourselves available to be the answer to the countless people in turmoil around. Let Me equip you, energise and lead you. Do not fear, for you are the only answer to the cries of this village."

Part of our personal approach involves the use of appropriate literature. Every newcomer to the village is presented with a welcome leaflet giving details of the area, village information, and what the parish church can offer them. Another leaflet is available for those who venture into church. And we make a point of

seeing that everyone is warmly welcomed.

## **MISSION PARTNERS**

Our responsibility in evangelism should not be restricted to parish evangelism. We are charged to be Christ's witnesses to the furthest corners of the earth. Inside the church porch is a prominent display promoting our support of mission partners world-wide, with the text from 3 John 7,8 (New English Bible): "It was on Christ's work that they went out... We are bound to support such men, and so play our part in spreading the truth,"

We believe missionary work is important and that missionaries should not only be supported generously in prayer and finance (as a first call upon our church income) but also with frequent personal links by letter, phone or where feasible visiting teams; and that the societies we support should be in line with our church's vision, such that we can encourage and equip people in our fellowship to be called into it.

As a small church we have felt it best to support a few societies well rather than spread the interest too thinly. It has been an increasing joy in recent years to support couples involved in treating drug abuse in Pakistan (with Church Missionary Society) and translating the Scriptures out in Kenya (with Bible Society), as also giving to Tear Fund (in a Development Project in Peru) and ABWON (Action for Biblical Witness to our Nation). And we rejoiced when one of our number was sent off to Torquay for Operation Year with Youth With A Mission. A number of others have gone forth to other churches in the UK, and we are glad that what they have learned in Tollerton will be put to good use elsewhere. The more sent out, the greater the need to see new people saved to serve as committed members in Tollerton. So the work never stops, as we enter another Decade of Evangelism. Who knows if it will not hasten the coming of our Lord!

### NOTES:

1. See Chapter 6.
2. This can be seen in the table below, listing some highlights of our evangelistic endeavours.

1980	Parish Camp in Leicestershire (led by Basingstoke Community Church leaders); New Life Tent Mission, Keyworth; Evangelistic Supper at Rectory: Martin Winbolt-Lewis; monthly evangelistic Youth Services (led by visiting churches in Nottingham area).
1981	Parish Day with evangelistic challenge (with Greens from Chorleywood) issuing in a 5 year Vision; Evangelistic Supper at Rectory: Grenville Wright; West Bridgford Tent Mission; Wolds Bible Ministries: various evangelistic (and celebratory) events.
1982	Parish Weekend (with Andy Barker); Ian Knox at Wolds Bible Ministries Evangelistic Dinner at Bunny Hill.
1983	The Battle Bus in preparation for Ian Knox 5 Day Mission (November).

- 1984      Diocesan Centenary Luke's Gospel distribution; Mission England, Birmingham; Downs Bible Week: beginnings of church attendance, creating evangelistic vision.
- 1985      Weekend of Evangelism and Renewal (with Tony Higton), with subsequent building up of Committed Membership; Mission England, Sheffield.
- 1986      Easter Commitment to Vision (incl. evangelism); New House groups (with open evenings) and Prayer Cells (incl. outreach and spiritual warfare); House group focus on Ben Davies' How to be Effective in Evangelism; Downs Bible Week: encouragement to produce personal tracts; David Wheaton and Oak Hill team evangelistic weekend; Dan Cozens consultation on parish mission; Hawkwell visit: repairing our witness; Opening of Church Centre: week of outreach with S John, Gerald Paddock etc. ; Young Church Fun Day.
- 1987      Welcome leaflets in church with testimonies; Lunch Bunch starts; Easter Weekend with Dave Fellingham team; Circus Project initiative; House group Autumn suppers with Gerald Paddock and Alan Haskey.
- 1988      Good News Down the Street begins; House group suppers; Questionnaires to assess needs in village; Autumn Barnabas Group starts (David Watson video: Jesus then and now); October: leading Seiston Parish Weekend with team; November Evangelistic Supper with Peter Nodding.
- 1989      Youthquake supper with Ray Ashley <March>; April Evangelistic Celebration at Long Eaton with team; Billy Graham Mission 89, at Meadows and Wembley; 'Welcome to your new home' leaflet; Leaders Fellowship meeting with Paul Morris, Adviser in Evangelism; November Film 'Caught' (Odeon); November Finger Buffet: Bob Spaight.
- 1990      Southampton Weekend Barbecue & Family Celebration; Harvest Home and Auction in Church Centre.

3.      **The Circus Project** was an imaginative idea devised by one of our members, Nicky Hambley, incorporating a play for children, called 'The Clown' which would be performed for several nights in the church centre, and during the days beforehand Circus members in their costume would visit homes, the school and shops inviting people to the play. The aim was principally to reach families through their children, to communicate the basic truths of the Gospel by drama, and to convey an atmosphere of fun, colour, relevance and a non-judgemental approach, in order to improve relationships between the Church and village and pave the way for further contacts. For various reasons the project had to be shelved, and we have not had the resources since then to mount it,
4.      We have also shared the baptistry of a local Pentecostal church and hired the local swimming pool. But we prefer baptisms to take place as close to the church as possible so that the maximum number of people on the fringe of the church can be present to bear witness to this powerful means of grace. Otherwise, there is the danger of appearing exclusive, and for baptisms to appear to be another hole-in-a-corner affair, like the proverbial christenings. Speaking of holes, we had considered digging a very temporary hole in the church yard (adding a waterproof lining) and using that for a one-off baptistry, truly bringing out the symbolism of being buried with Christ.

5. The Parish Weekend we were invited to lead for the parish of Selston with Westwood in 1988 was particularly rewarding. It was on the theme of Pastoral Care. Not only were significant people healed and relationships restored, there were conversions, too. Our own team were greatly encouraged at the outcome.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### STRATEGY & ORDER IN THE CHURCH

Whenever I visit a fellow minister's home, I always like to glance into his study, and if I see his desk is tidy and in order I marvel. If only mine was! I begin to suspect that either he's a brilliant administrator, or has one, or else he is not inclined to do very much. Although I have used a filofax, including personal planners, throughout my ministerial life, and in recent years have made full use of a Personal Computer Word Processor, my study always seems to be cluttered with papers, books, articles, and office equipment. Administration is not my greatest asset. Yet I do have a fairly orderly mind and I do like the church to be run in an efficient way, and for everyone to know where we are heading as a church. It is for this reason that I have always believed in good communication within the church. And strong leadership, growing delegation and accountability, and the exercise of clear discipline, where necessary.

As already recounted, when we arrived in Tollerton, I set out some clear goals at the first Annual Parochial Church Meeting and encouraged the Parochial Church Council to develop a vision for the next three to five years. Eventually, six years later, we took on board the Hawkwell (ABWON) Vision of the nature and mission of the local church (listed fully in the appendix of Tony Higton's book,<sup>1</sup> *That the world may believe*, and summarised below), and from Easter 1986 introduced the concept of committed membership, already described.

Arising partly from discussions about one of the Administery<sup>2</sup> Papers on improving the running of Parochial Church Councils and partly from publication of Archdeacon Gordon Kurht's book on Council Meetings,<sup>3</sup> the PCC drew up what became an eight page illustrated Standing Orders booklet which not only helped the smoother and more efficient running of the PCC and its subcommittees, but also incorporated in its recommended structures the outworking of the vision. At the same time we made sure that clear, full and information packed agendas were issued and accurate and action orientated minutes were produced, so that meetings were conducted without the wasting of valuable time, and with prayer having the top priority.

Furthermore, arising from my attendance at a MARC Europe Seminar on Vision Building and Strategic Planning and with the encouragement of a member of our congregation who had expertise in administration, we drew up a Strategic Plan, which is regularly revised, consisting of:

- A. **Our Mission Statement:** "Build the church and save the lost";
- B. **Our Vision Statement** = Vision taught through Commitment Course, herein summarised as:

A united fellowship, 'one in heart and mind', all of whose members are:

1. Wholeheartedly committed to Christ as Saviour and Lord!
2. Doers of the Word, not hearers only.
3. Experiencing the Power of the Holy Spirit.

4. Living adventurously by faith in God's protection and provision.
5. Humbly seeking holiness before God.
6. Offering wholehearted praise and worship to God,
7. Involved in disciplined, intensive intercession and 'hearing God.
8. Discerning one another's gifts and practising 'every member ministry'
9. Deeply committed to each other: united in fellowship; loyal to and trusting each other including the leaders; encouraging and correcting each other; sharing needs and possessions.
10. Involved in urgent evangelism, with signs, wonders and spiritual warfare, in the light of the Return of Christ.

C. **Our Strategic Objectives** (over the next three years)

and

- D. **Our Short Term Goals** (over the next twelve months) each under the headings of PCC subcommittees, namely Outreach Department, with Lunch Bunch; House group Department, with Barnabas Group and Prayer Cells; Young Church Department; and Creative Worship, and each with details of responsibility and accountability.

Having a Strategic Plan has been invaluable in helping us assess progress made, and provoke us to fresh challenge. Not only is the PCC involved in this and the fellowship, too, but also the Leaders Fellowship.

## **THE LEADERS FELLOWSHIP**

The Leaders Fellowship, which emerged out of the original nucleus concerned with introducing committed membership into the life of the fellowship, brings together those in key leadership roles in the church (house group leaders, prayer cell co-ordinator, young church co-ordinator, creative worship leader, wardens, together with their believing spouses). Members are appointed by the Rector. It is neither a committee, nor is it accountable to the PCC per se, though most, if not all, are PCC members, nor has it legal standing. It is basically what its name purports, a fellowship, helping to ensure clear lines of communication between the Rector and those in leadership with him. It provides an opportunity for him to envision the leaders, share pastoral and disciplinary matters, and encourage the praying through of important issues affecting the restoration of biblical principles and structures in the church. Often matters will be talked and prayed through and decisions made without any recourse to the P00; sometimes there may need for the P00 to ratify such decisions.

Because it is a fellowship of those who are in leadership (and thereby eager to take a lead), a fellowship therefore of those with strongly-held opinions, it has not always been the easiest of forums. If the vision we share spells out in detail "the importance of being deeply committed to each other: loyal to and trusting each other, defending one another against negative criticisms, not being judgmental or jumping to conclusions about each other; being open and honest with one another, including giving and receiving prayerful encouragement and correction and putting right any negative criticism in each other; not each 'doing his or her own thing' in the rebellious spirit of the age, but aiming to achieve a

unity of heart and mind in which the church moves enthusiastically as one in obedience to God so that the world may believe," it is perhaps no surprise that not everything has been plain sailing, either for the leaders or for some church members. After all, we pursued excellence and preferred not to 'agree to differ' but rather to be like-minded' over the issues that faced us, issues that we were unprepared to gloss over.<sup>4</sup>

The church enjoyed remarkable unity since the introduction of the commitment course and committed membership, and was almost totally free from gossip or dissent. One incident stands out. For years those involved behind the scenes working in the kitchen, for example, preparing for some social event like a Harvest supper would fall out with each other and engage in much gossip. This no longer happened once those who had come to a lively faith in Jesus took part. And it was remarked by one elderly lady how very different the atmosphere was in the kitchen, no backbiting, no gossip, real friendship, co-operation and love.

Yet within the leaders fellowship there were times when our unity was stretched to near breaking point. Many churches find Parochial Church Councils or Vestry Meetings times of high drama over relatively minor issues and the cause for sleepless nights at the Rectory. Since 1985 FOGs have been tremendous times of fellowship, for the real decisions were often made in principle elsewhere. In contrast the leaders fellowship was the place where tensions were more evident and resolution harder to come by.

To be sure, I speak in relative terms, for there had always been absolute unanimity over the essentials of the faith, over the need to implement the vision, and to see the church built up on good and firm foundations, with a desire to reach out into the community with the love of Christ.

But we did have difficulties from time to time. Olive Calver testifies in his book *Sold Out* <sup>5</sup> "When you are thrown together with... other people you do get problems We had to learn to appreciate the differences in each other, to draw out the talents of each other, to love one another under pressure, to be honest, committed and sincere in all that we did, to relax together, to work together... We were all fairly immature and made far too many mistakes, but God has never been too concerned about the quality of his people when he is only beginning to work within them."

Our difficulties - the strain and tension we underwent were partly due to personality differences, personal hang-ups, sentiment and immaturity, partly due to perceived pressures upon us of people and time (whether at work, home or church) together with overt tiredness, and partly due simply to over familiarity with each other and the predictability of our mutual reactions and responses. It was a learning time, when we went through growing pains, with some wanting to spread their wings and flex their muscles and become more independent. But in it all we held together, committed to each other, striving to be what indeed we were, a fellowship of leaders, to the immense benefit of the church, which was mercifully unaware of any controversy amongst the leadership, whose deliberations remained confidential at all times. There were periods when the quibbles, quirks and fairly petty differences lingered in our memory rather longer than the many good things about which we were wholeheartedly in agreement and the many risk taking decisions which 'seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us'. Amidst the tensions and struggles were great joys and triumphs. But 'glory in the church' is not found without pain and hassle. Those of us in leadership experienced both.

## HEART FOR EVANGELISM

Certain subjects aroused intense reaction. Evangelism was one issue that never left us. We were never without doubt as to its strategic importance in the purposes of God. It was part of our vision. But how were we to implement it? And how soon could we expect to make an impact in the community? As we have recounted in a previous chapter we tried many ways of making Christ known, and always kept evangelism high on our agenda. The new house groups were encouraged to have frequent outreach activities, but for these to get off the ground required the leaders themselves to be enthusiastic in encouraging others and setting an example, especially in friendship evangelism.

One problem we came up with time and time again was that not everyone in the leadership felt they had a 'heart' for evangelism. This phrase emanated from a prophetic word from Hawkwell in September 1986, following the Gift Day and before the Opening of the Church Centre.

"My children, I have seen your commitment to one another and to Me. I have seen your sacrificial giving as you recognised the needs of the church and I am pleased.

"I am calling you now, My children, to lift up your eyes and see the needs of those outside the church. I am calling you to look not at a problem of material need but of spiritual life or death. I want you to ask Me to stir your hearts with compassion as you see these people on their way to a lost eternity. They do not know Me now and they cannot know Me hereafter unless they turn to My Son who died for them.

"Are you prepared to sacrifice even more for this need? Are you prepared to give yourselves in prayer and fasting, in going and telling, even if it costs you your time and reputation? But pray and go in love, My children. Ask Me to share My heart with you so that you might share it with others. 11

For the few it turned out to be a counterproductive word.

## PRESSURES OF TIME

Linked with this was a reluctance to set aside yet more time in an already busy schedule for befriending neighbours. Some already felt over-stretched carrying out their other family and church responsibilities without yet another demand upon their time. Certainly most committed members and leaders were heavily committed in the running of the church. It always amused me in meeting church officers of other local churches when they thought they were busier enough giving just one or at the most two evenings to church work, when this was the norm for an ordinary member of our church (at house group and committee), and leaders were expected to give, on very rare occasions, up to six evenings a week! We were aware, of course, that time needed to be set aside for members to get on with personal evangelism. But it was a constant struggle for some people willingly to find the time for making friends and inviting them round to their homes. There was a danger that some were beginning to draw lines beyond which they were not prepared to go, whereas the commitment Christ calls us to is unlimited and without boundaries.

Ideally, those in leadership ought to be allowed a sabbatical every now and then before taking on a new role. Being such a small and active church, we had to dispense with this luxury, and there were times when some leaders were in danger of burnout! We did relieve some from areas of leadership for a while,



though this meant yet more pressure upon those who had to take on their job in addition to their own. There were periods when we did have too many meetings and we tried reducing them, or combining them, or allowing spouses to absent themselves, especially when they had baby-sitting problems. More recently meetings have been drastically reduced. But even when we reduced the time pressure to give them more time for evangelism, this did not necessarily lead to more hospitality towards unbelievers. For where there was no heart for evangelism, no passion for seeing souls saved, time would not be set aside for it.

## **SENTIMENTAL LOVE**

The other matter linked with evangelism was sentiment. This was spelt out in a number of ways, and mostly reflected people's insecurities. We must not put people off, they would say. We don't want to offend them. (We don't want to risk ruining our friendships). Keep evangelism low-key. We must love them into the kingdom, and speak only of the good things happening at church, and avoid any mention of the wages of sin and of going to a lost eternity. Some linked their lack of heart for witnessing to their lack of felt love for outsiders.

At one particular period when some in leadership were a bit in the doldrums not only because of a disappointing outcome from one evangelistic campaign but because we felt let down by an evangelist's (arguably wise) decision not to lead a proposed parish mission, I happened to preach at a Christmas Christingle Service, to which many outsiders had come. I gave a particularly challenging word on living in the light and love of God that clearly spelt out at one point the distinctive differences between believers and unbelievers, including an illustration about moths (that are attracted to the light) and cockroaches (that opt for the darkness).<sup>6</sup> It was a talk I had given elsewhere without, untoward reaction, and indeed on this occasion there had been a fair amount of laughter earlier on. But the talk was felt by some leaders to be unbiblical and unloving. One guest had been put off by it, I was told. An issue was made of it. In actual fact, this person had been made to come to terms with her own lifestyle before God and in later months was drawn for a while into enquiring further about Christ. But, in that the gospel message had disturbed someone's new contact, it was regarded as unloving.

But true love is something very different from sentimental love. There is a kindness in God's love which we must express in all our evangelism and pastoral care, but there is also a sterner aspect. True love confronts and challenges and hopefully draws out a responsive love for the Lord. On this occasion the challenge to come into the light of God's mercy and grace was perceived by some as a condemnation of those still in the darkness, from whom Christians should keep their distance. It was a travesty of what I wanted to convey, but it taught me to be more careful in future to try and communicate God's truth in ways and words that would neither cause unnecessary offence, nor become mere 'comfort and guidance' sentiment.

## **DISCIPLINE**

Sentiment is also an unhappy bedfellow with the proper exercise of discipline. And this was another issue that we had to face. There is not much evidence of discipline within the Church of England, save in matters of grave misconduct by clergy. But the rubrics and exhortations in the Lord's Supper in the Book of Common Prayer spell out the need for discipline, as of course so do the Scriptures. Even before the introduction of committed membership, there had been the need for setting things right.

For instance, near the beginning of our ministry, two gifted people had to be removed from our church music group because they were 'living in sin', and were not prepared to repent of their extramarital involvement or put things right and receive the forgiveness of God. We approached them with kindness as fellow believers, and felt great pain at their negative reaction. We persisted with them and spent many hours in discussion. Eventually, a transfer of church became necessary, and in due course led to a happy outcome.

Another person, when it was suggested by a fellow-worshipper that her lifestyle was not compatible with receiving communion, willingly abstained! But discipline would have been hard to administer within a 'mixed' congregation that did not all subscribe to biblical authority. Indeed, some in leadership in the early years, did not take kindly to Christ's teaching on getting right with others. When the crunch came, rather than getting things right, they took umbrage and left all together.

With the introduction of committed membership, however, it became possible for discipline to be given and received, not always with a happy outcome, but at least things wrong in the committed fellowship were properly addressed. The commitment course itself brought much to the surface, and meant that some who were not willing to get things right did not become committed members. One escaped to another church, but not without that church's leaders knowing the true circumstances, thereby being in a position to minister to her deep needs and encourage her into restored fellowship, to our great joy.

Unhealthy transfers from church to church are the bane of church life, and there could be some useful research into their causes and prevention. I have nothing against healthy transfers - there can be any number of good reasons for moving church (churchmanship and church visions being important factors) - but, where people leave 'out of fellowship', it usually brings no blessing to the receiving church, and I would counsel church leaders where possible to make sure of their good standing before allowing them loose in their church. One of the many benefits of having a commitment course is that problems are brought to the surface before further damage is done, and that those who take on leadership are in one heart and mind with the strategic vision.

It became the responsibility of house group leaders to ensure that their members maintained a good standing in the Lord. If they were themselves touched with sentiment, it was harder to deal with those who really needed their help, perhaps in the area of family life, the more so if it was not welcomed.

I remember one mother, who tended to be quite independent, 'doing her own thing', going out to work whilst her children were still very young, and who did not really give them or her husband the attention they needed. Her witness was being compromised and her involvement in the life of the church was being effected. She was considering working longer hours. She clearly needed pastoral help but her house group leaders were uncertain how to give it, not wanting to bring offence or to be seen to be interfering, though, of course, wanting to see the matter resolved.

It was at that time that I issued a brief memo to the house group members, reminding them of one sentence from the commitment course: "It is unwise to make important personal decisions, e. g. moving house, changing job, changing churches, without seeking the advice and confirmation of the body of Christ and sometimes the overall leaders." I encouraged those making decisions to share in confidence with their leaders (and where appropriate share also with their house group for prayer), trusting this would lead to unity of heart and mind. But

I added: "If, however, you feel unable to take the counsel of the body of Christ, the Church would respect you, love you and keep you in fellowship (unless it is something extremely serious). But you would not qualify for leadership in the church and you would make yourself vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. In the end she had to stop work for her husband's job necessitated the family moving to another locality. But she left in good fellowship.

I think of another, who strictly speaking ought never to have become a committed member, for he was never truly one in heart and mind with the vision nor had he a clear grasp of the gospel, but he did enjoy the warmth of our fellowship and he was glad to contribute his talents (at a cost). Much time was spent with him in personal counselling and pastoral care by the leaders, trying their patience at times, but there were areas of dishonesty and deception in his life that required a repentance he was unwilling to make. His presence in the fellowship became increasingly disruptive and it was coming to the point when we were wondering how to discipline him in a loving way that he would really understand, when one final act of dishonesty caused him to leave us of his own accord to another place. We were both glad and sad.

I think of someone, whose gifts undoubtedly enriched the life of our church. But he was a recent convert and, unknowingly, allowed worldly ways to effect relationships in the fellowship, and pride and impatience to mar his testimony. There came the point where he not only distrusted my judgment and sowed seeds of distrust in others (disguised as articulating their concern about the way 'many people' felt) but manipulated the direction of our meetings, questioning my authority and threatening our unity. It was all the more painful because we had invested so much time in his family and rejoiced in the day when all had eventually come to know the Lord. The matter came to a head and something had to be done; it ought to have been nipped in the bud much earlier. We talked and prayed for long periods in private, but got nowhere. We agreed to invite one of the Hawkwell staff to mediate between us, but it did not lead to any change in attitude. Soon afterwards he succumbed to ill health and eventually left the area 'out of fellowship' and not without unhappiness elsewhere. It was a sad episode in the life of the church, but unless there had been a change of heart and attitude, had he stayed, greater damage might have been done. But we do not see it as the end of the story; we look to the day when relationships will be renewed.

Attitude is all-important. Clive Calver says<sup>7</sup>: "Even if we are right we put ourselves wrong by our own feelings of pride and injustice, our 'rightness' is measured not by our academic correctness but by our right attitude of love, sympathy, empathy and support. We have no God-given prerogative to put everybody right, only our loving commitment to somebody can earn us that privilege. As A W Tozer once put it, 'Always it is more important that we retain a right spirit towards others, than that we bring them to our way of thinking, even if our way is right.'"

So often rifts are caused by something almost insignificant - a simple misunderstanding, a throwaway comment, or what was intended to be a harmless joke. It was my brief and blunt reply to one lady's complaint that was taken amiss by her, and she decided to leave the church as a result. But heartfelt apology and patient explanation led to her return not only to church services but to a really deep involvement in the fellowship life, and a strengthened bond between us which I have greatly cherished.

Contrary to what this chapter may suggest, discipline does not and need not happen often in a small church. Indeed it will only ever be occasional even in

larger churches, except during an initial period of introducing discipline when there may be a backlog of long unresolved issues.

We now encourage each other to get things right at the earliest opportunity. An exposition by John Wilthew of Jesus' teaching on church disciplines was of great help to us all at that time, and as the leadership matured, so we found things rarely got out of hand. Leaders learnt to pastor those in their groups with greater diligence. And many benefited from the ministry in church, especially at the celebrations, where hurts were healed, relationships reconciled and ministries strengthened, for the upbuilding of the church and the evangelisation of the locality. Often we went back into the world with great joy and triumph over what God had done in our midst, and eager to face the week ahead with renewed hope and a longing to see God's work efficiently done and God's word spreading rapidly and being honoured.

#### NOTES:

1. *That the world may believe*, published by Marshalls, 1985.
2. Administry, set up by John Truscott, is concerned with rediscovering gifts of administration in churches. To join, contact Administry, 69 Sandridge Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4AG.
3. A Handbook for Council and Committee Members, by Gordon Kurht, is published by Mowbray, 1985.
4. Terry Virgo deals with this matter in a talk given at Downs Bible Week in 1988, available from New Frontiers International,
5. See page 107 'Sold Out: Taking the lid off evangelism' by Clive Calver (Lakeland, Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1980). The whole of chapter six is full of useful comment, including a valuable chart on relationships on page 108.
6. The illustration was taken from Francis Foulkes Study Guide to Ephesians (IVP 1968) page 110.
7. See page 113 'Sold Out'.
8. A tape of John Wilthew's talk (based on Matthew 18:15-17) is available from Clarendon Church, Hove, where John is an elder. Cassette No; JW890828.CE. David Jackman has also spoken on discipline at the Evangelical Ministry Assembly at St. Helen's Bishopsgate, June 1990.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### FAMILY LIFE AND THE CHURCH

Tollerton will ever remain in my affections as the place where I became a father to four wonderful sons, who are truly a heritage from the Lord. "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." It has been a joyful privilege to work from home and to see them grow up from babyhood to boyhood. Derek Kidner<sup>1</sup> commenting on Ps 127 writes "The greater their promise, the more likely that these sons will be a handful before they are a quiverful. They are certainly a houseful, the more so when they bring their friends. But we have been blessed with a fair-sized modern house with substantial grounds in a lovely environment.

Many wonder how we cope with four boys. The main answer is that our home is graced with a very capable and loving Christian wife and mother. Few families in Tollerton, if any, have four boys; certainly at school we are about the only family with even three children there, and had we stayed in Tollerton another year there would actually have been one term when all four would have been there at one time. The other answer is that the boys are growing up in the nurture and fear of the Lord. It was Maurice Wood on the day that my eldest son was born who said it was his prayer that John would never know a day in his life when he had not known the love of Jesus. It was a thrill when at the age of five he invited Jesus into his life (whilst I was away at a conference) and his brothers are following him in the Way.

Perhaps it was a surprise to some that we never had our children 'christened'. Whilst we appreciate that the Church of England permits infant baptism and that the New Testament describes household baptisms (which may have included young children), we do believe it better for the children to be baptised when they are old enough to make up their own mind to opt in to the Christian church. So many people coming to faith today are disappointed that they are not allowed to get baptised at the time of their conversion since they have already been 'done' in infancy. So our children were dedicated instead in a service of Thanksgiving and Blessing, each within a fortnight of being born. Our Lord welcomed children and blessed them, and at St. Peter's we always encouraged parents to bring along their newborn infants to church to receive a congregational welcome and God's blessing upon them. We made it our practice from the start to welcome children into our fellowship and make them feel a real part of today's church.

Family services were not simply children's services, but times of worship where all ages could come together and be lost in wonder love and praise. Children in the Way was the title of a General Synod report. Some used to find the presence of children in church a bit of a nuisance. But attitudes did change. And today youngsters can be sure of a warm welcome, and times within the service specially for them, and no-one would wish back the state of things in our own childhood, when we sat up straight in serried ranks and all was hush. It is, of course, much easier for children these days when the worship is informal and fully participatory. It has been good to belong to a church that welcomes the young and treats them as belonging not to tomorrow's church but today's.

With the beginnings of our link with Hawkwell, we changed the 'Sunday School' to 'Young Church', and we also used as our Sunday syllabus Scripture Union's

'Learning All Together', so that the teaching in Young Church and in the main services would all be on the same theme, making it easier for families to talk over Sunday lunch about the things each had learnt. Young Church (affiliated to CYPEC, the Youth Department of Church Pastoral Aid Society) also ran clubs for Explorers, Pathfinders and Youthquake, so the youngsters had a full and varied social programme. And from time to time there were special Fun Days laid on. However good the Sunday ministry may be, it is in the home that children grow up to know and love God and I in the home that they are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We have always prayed that our borne (even if, as a Rectory, it may be more public than some homes) might be a place of love, security and truth. Whatever the pressures of the ministry, we have always tried to give the children prime time to talk, to play and to learn together. As they have got older, so the pattern has changed, in my case, for instance, from praying with then last thing at night (Lord, keep me safe this night... ) to doing Quest with them last thing before school (Lord God, please help me to understand what I read in the Bible today... ). And as soon as they are off to school, praying with my wife about the concerns of the day ahead. We have always believed in firm discipline (including the very occasional wooden spoon) administered in love and the children are glad to know the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. We have always stressed the need to say sorry and receive forgiveness from each other. We believe we have got them started on the right road, and that they will grow up to be strong in the Lord.

Many women today with quite young families go out to work; some have to in order to make ends meet, or because their husbands insist on it; others do so because they find life at home boring and unfulfilling. I am blessed with a wife who finds great fulfilment bringing up our young family. It is a time consuming business, the more so as they grow older. She is also heavily involved in the life of the church, fully supportive of my ministry and an inspiration to us all. That some clergy wives cope with a full-time job as well amazes me, when there is so much worthwhile that can be done together in the parish. Some clergy wives, of course, choose not to get too involved in church life (not wishing to be non-stipendiary curates), whilst other women in the congregation are longing to do more and more and the scope is wide indeed for women's ministry. In Tollerton we prefer couples, where possible, to be involved together in most aspects of church life. This can lead to greater pressures for some, yet a shared ministry can lighten the load as well. Some would do well to learn how better to organise their time. A filofax is not a bad investment for church members, certainly for leaders. Some worry too much about their families that they do not give themselves wholly to the work of ministry outside the home. These are areas we have had to teach about. There is a need for balance.

Some are amazed that we can enjoy a roast lunch on Sundays within half an hour of leaving church. It is the easiest thing to do when you know how, but many forgo it because of church attendance, or have it later in the day. We always enjoy a good roast and Sunday lunches are always special times of fellowship as a family. And we have always majored on hospitality, having an open home, and inviting many people round for meals.

Whilst our home is a hive of activity we do ensure that one day a week is a day-off, and that the church know that bar extreme emergencies we are not available. This has maintained our sanity, got us out of the parish, enriched our marriage, and refreshed us for our shared ministry.

Although the nuclear family is only a small percentage of the community these days, there is no reason why the church or church members should not lay on special fun times for families. With all our heavy schedules associated with committed membership, it is good to enjoy ourselves, and let our hair down,

have a game of cricket or football, or just eat and talk and relax. It has been good to belong to a fellowship where we can really enjoy each other's company and meet each other's friends. It is often through the children that many friendships are made and this bodes well for introducing new families to the Lord.

Gone are the days when church was just mattins or evensong. Today church is family. That includes worship on a Sunday, but it embraces all the varied activities of the week. We relate to one another as children of the same heavenly Father, and as brothers of Jesus. And in young and old the Spirit calls out: Abba Father, In my opinion, family life and church family life go together. And it's great belonging to both families.

A prayer I often make my own, not just for our own family but for the church family, is Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus<sup>2</sup>.

Father and God, from whom the world derives  
all fatherhood in every family,  
we bow our knees for power to fill our lives  
your mighty grace, your Spirit's energy:

For Christ to make his home in every heart  
to plant and build us in his love's pure strength;  
to help his church to grasp in every part  
love's boundless height and depth, and breadth and length.

With all God's fulness let us now be filled,  
and know the splendour of his love unknown;  
expect the gifts a father gives his child  
and see the trophies that our king has won.

To God be praise! His power in us can do  
far more than we can ask or understand;  
through Jesus Christ who by his church  
makes new for every age the glories God has planned.

#### NOTES:

1. Psalms 73-150, A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms (MP).
2. From Chris Idles version of Ephesians 3:14 -21 in *Hymns for Today's Church*.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE LEARNING CHURCH

#### GLORY IN THE CHURCH

I have attempted in this book to give an honest, unvarnished account of God's envisioning of a rural congregation as I have seen it, as their Rector. Others in the church obviously see things in quite another way from their different perspective. Hearing church members testify in the parish and in church, to deanery synods and to other fellowships, the things they have seen and heard and experienced over recent years can only bring great joy to all our hearts, and praise to our Father in heaven. For "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus"<sup>1</sup> is what they have witnessed. In contrast to my wife and others, I suppose I tend to view a building as half-empty rather than half-full, to see a problem as a setback rather than as an opportunity, and to observe in people the warts more than the wonders. It is not the best way of looking at things, for we should behold the riches and treasures of Christ, the glory and beauty of Christ in every person.

However, those in leadership are at the sharp end. The buck stops with us (or possibly the Bishop), and we feel the brunt of any attack upon the church. So we tend to be more aware of the hassles in the church than most members of the fellowship who sense the glory. Sometimes we may even be part of the problem, and I take my share of the blame in certain instances. As I stated in a previous chapter "glory in the is not found without pain and hassle. We shall experience both. Jesus did. "For the joy set before him (he) endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."<sup>2</sup> The prophets predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."<sup>3</sup>

#### HASSLES IN THE HEAVENLIES

There are times when I have wondered what has been going on in the spiritual realms. When there has been some dishonour in the church and the glory has departed for a while, has it not caused hassles in the heavenlies? When we saw some rupture in the fellowship, some breakdown in relationships, some wrong attitudes, did it not cause consternation in the heavenly places? Might one have overheard the angelic hosts exclaiming "My, they're at it again, Lord; let's come to their aid." And Jesus intercedes for the saints to save the situation, to bring about repentance and restoration.

Sometimes the difficulties we face may be through no fault of our own but caused by hassles in the heavenlies. The enemy has been at work. As a praying church, with much emphasis on intercession, we have all be aware that a spiritual battle goes on in the heavenlies, and resistance between the principalities and powers of darkness and the angelic powers of heaven hold back spiritual advance.<sup>4</sup> We know for sure that when we seek to operate at the leading edge of God's activity, which means doing things that are riot yet done or considered acceptable in the majority of even lively Anglican churches, we must be ready for battle. Hassles in the heavenlies and most certainly glory in the church. A bit of both, until the critical moment comes when we are presented



faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, a radiant church without stain or wrinkle, or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>5</sup>

We have sought as a parish church of very ordinary people to prepare ourselves for that day. That has meant in our fellowship not simply the renewal of what already exists through the Spirit's working among us, but a restoration of so much that has been lost or neglected over many years. We want to be brought to the perfection God desires as seen in our Lord Jesus Christ, whose prayer for his disciples has yet to be fully answered "that we may all be one... so that the world may believe."<sup>6</sup>

That is why we have found the mnemonic 'TIME' so helpful. It not only has a prophetic note heralding the day when the Bridegroom will meet his Bride, the Church, but it spells out **Together- in Intercession, Ministry and Evangelism**. We have seen how a rural church has entered into a deep unity of heart and mind that we could hardly have dreamt possible a decade ago, and we believe that this can happen wherever a church is willing under its leadership to be restored to biblical principles in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We make no pretence at having arrived, for the outworking of these principles is an ongoing process. We have to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>7</sup> Having created, we have to conserve, those Scriptural structures that facilitate the church being led by those anointed with the gifts of the ascended Lord, and every member being equipped and encouraged to build up the church and to bring the love of Christ to our world.

Once the structures are in place that facilitate every member intercession, ministry and evangelism, we will be led by the Spirit as to how to proceed. There is no blue print. We need to look to the Lord, and in our desire to see people won for Jesus, think of imaginative ways of reaching them.

To give just one example, we had had plans for last harvest tide to mount a harvest event in a local public house where we had hopes of engaging with people who would not normally come to a church, but who might be prepared to sing a few well-known harvest hymns, hear a low-key gospel talk, and join in the fun of an auction of harvest produce for charity. Due to circumstances beyond our control, the venue had to be changed to our church centre. This meant it could now be open for the whole family. We called it a harvest home. It began with some food (ploughman and cider glass, fruit juice for the children). This was followed by a band that set the mood and led us into harvest hymns. A visiting group sang a song, then our invited speaker very clearly and engagingly linked harvest with the gospel message and gave people an opportunity to respond. And some did. The evening concluded with an enjoyable auction of harvest produce that had decorated the church that morning, and the proceeds went to the homeless.

The event had been preceded by much prayer (in the house groups, the prayer cells and by the PCC), and in the giving out of personal invitations, Four years previously God had given us a clear impression that the renovated church centre, once a tithe barn, would become a place where people would be gathered in to enjoy a spiritual harvest As we prayed this time, we were reminded of that, and the words of Mark Altrogge's song<sup>8</sup> gripped our imagination afresh:

You came to seek and to save the captives of sin.  
When we had wandered away You gathered us in.

You are preparing a feast, You want Your house filled,  
As You sought us so shall we seek others too.

This Is Your will.

*For You are the Lord of the harvest.*

*You give the increase, You're building Your church.*

*You are the Lord of the harvest,*

*Pouring out Your Spirit in the earth,*

*Pouring out Your Spirit in the earth.*

Now the fellowship had for some time been making a habit of looking out for new people moving into the area, having prayed for families to arrive in the village who would be open to the gospel. Several members noticed a removal van outside one particular home on the Friday. Next day we took round our church welcome leaflet and personally invited them to the harvest home. Quite naturally Hilary thought they would be too busy settling into their new home, but her husband Trevor suggested it might make a welcome break. And so they came that Sunday evening. God spoke to them in a way they had not known before, and both of them responded to the gospel appeal by raising their hands while heads were bowed. In the weeks following, they embarked on our Commitment Course, Trevor was confirmed, they saw the arrival of their firstborn son, and they opened up their home as a venue for the Commitment Group. Such is one way God continues to build up his church, and through this group of Christians, young in the faith, and learning day by day, God will be pleased to gather others, too, into his glorious presence.

#### NOTES:

1. Ephesians 3:20,
2. Hebrews 12:2,3.
3. 1 Peter 2: 12.
4. Compare Daniel 10:13.
5. Jude 24 (AV); Ephesians 5:27.
6. John 17:21-23.
7. Ephesians 4:3.
8. Mark Altrogge © 1987 People of Destiny/ Thankyou Music.

## EPILOGUE

In the entrance porch of St. Peter's, Tollerton hangs an inscribed list of Rectors going back to William de Olive, circa 1180, and finishing with me. Some lasted only a few days, others stayed almost a lifetime. Just to look at the list humbles me, in the recognition that incumbents come and go, but the ministry of the local church carries on under the headship of Christ, an ever changing ministry adapting sometimes imperceptibly, sometimes more obviously, to the needs of each generation. Each overall leader may have played his particular part in God's overarching plan, but none is indispensable. The baton passes on to another. And Christ leads his people onward and upward, a glorious army with banners unfurled, until the Church Militant becomes the Church Triumphant in glory.

We came to Tollerton expecting to stay for ten years. With the introduction of committed membership we felt a very strong bond of fellowship with, and commitment to, the Christian community in the village. I vividly recall a 'phone call I received from the secretary of a patronage trust asking me if I were interested in a move. Before even finding out what parish was being offered for my consideration (a very attractive proposition it turned out to be), I told him that I was wholly committed to staying put. I had had a dream only a few nights before, and in that dream I had been invited to a particular church in the West Country, and had all but agreed to go there, when I suddenly realised I had not even consulted our leaders fellowship. Now we had expected our leaders to share with us when any moves were afoot and such was the level of commitment to one another we would have overridden considerations of promotion and advance rather than be drawn away from our responsibilities in Tollerton. Yet here I was in the dream not even sharing with my fellow leaders my intention of leaving them until it was all signed and sealed.

In due course we did feel the time was right to consider pastures new' and we shared this with some of our leadership. It became an unsettling time for us, and for them, as one door after another closed, but it was good to have their support in prayer. In some ways guidance appears to get harder the older one gets, and it is not always clear the best way to proceed. Do we push doors or wait for them to open? Do we follow our hunch or expect a direct word? We went through a long period without receiving any invitations or any joy from our applications. We were aware of certain vacancies that appeared to suit us well, especially churches that already enjoyed an ABWON link. Although we were open to go anywhere, even to New Zealand at one stage, we hoped ideally that we might finish up within easier reach of our ageing parents on the south coast. Daily we prayed but with no evident sign of the Lord's leading.

Then one day we heard of two different churches that were pursuing a similar vision to our own, whose incumbents were about to leave them. As we found out more, it transpired that God closed both doors and opened a third. It so happened I was a delegate at two separate conferences. At the one conference, I met a patron who shut the door on the first church, but met someone else who opened the door on a third church in Kent. At the other conference, I met a patron who shut the door on the second church, but met someone else who opened the door wider on the church in Kent. The invitation came to visit that church, but only moments beforehand, a separate invitation came to visit a church elsewhere. It was just what I had been hoping for, to receive two invitations on the same day, thereby helping me to weigh up the one against the other.

Both churches had their own appeal. The choice before us was clear: did we want to serve in another rural parish of similar size to our own, with a lovely vicarage in beautiful surroundings, and to lead the church on from where ours had been several years ago, and, having learned from our experience in Tollerton, to set about putting the principles we had practised here into operation there? Or did we want to go to a larger centre of population, inevitably in an urban area, with a much smaller vicarage in less attractive surroundings, and to serve a lively church that was much further along the way we had come? We warmed to both. But to the latter I felt I could be more myself and we felt great peace about going there.

On the day the church representatives rang through to confirm they wanted us to go to St. Peter's, Bexleyheath, we were holding a celebration at our evening service. During a time when various prophetic words were being shared, one spoke directly to our hearts: it was simply the word NEW. We were certain that word was for us. At the close of the service our son John shared a vision he had had during the time of waiting upon the Lord. It was a vivid picture of a hedgehog being shot at. And he realised that he was himself that hedgehog. And a man lifted him up and placed him in his pocket, protecting him from the shooting, and as he was taken along the road, the trees seemed to turn into blocks of flats. He had no inkling what it meant, but we took it as a marvellous word of reassurance, especially to our children, that in going from a rural situation with many trees to an urban situation, God would protect them.

We were reminded of that verse in 1 Samuel 25 and the Living Bible rendering of it: "You are safe in the care of the Lord your God, just as though you were safe inside His purse. Going to a new situation, and feeling very vulnerable, we could be assured we were very precious and safe in the hand of the Lord (including a prickly hedgehog, like myself). God hides us in his pocket; indeed, we are hid with Christ in God, secure and treasured. Good news indeed!

There was another confirmation that day that we were on course. A year before one of our wardens had given us a word of encouragement and assurance about leaving for Hebron (one of the biblical cities of refuge in the south). It had been a strengthening word at the time. But on this day what should my wife be reading, but the Lord's word to David to go to Hebron. And what should I be reading, but Abraham moving his tents in obedience to the Lord and settling outside Hebron, and building an altar there, renewing his commitment to God.

So we are doubly assured that the time is right to move south to our 'Hebron', there to discover a whole new sphere of ministry at yet another St. Peter's, my third in a row, and the first to which we go as a complete family.