



Born the eighth child of local Bootle parents in the 1930's Neville Black felt called to full-time ministry shortly after his Christian conversion in 1953. Following a period of training at Oakhill Theological College in London, he and his wife Val, also from Bootle,

dedicated their lives to serving the churches and communities of inner-city Liverpool for more than 50 years.

During their shared ministry, Neville felt on increasing unease with the church's approach to its work in the inner city and was challenged to re-examine his traditional Evangelical tools. In his own inimitable style, he speaks of 'failing to scratch where people itch'. Recognizing the gap between text and content, he has been recognized both locally and nationally as a visionary leader in the field of relating what is essentially Good News for all to people from a variety of backgrounds by being prepared to challenge accepted norms and embrace innovative ways to ensure that God's Kingdom is built on earth as is in Heaven.

In his foreword, Revd Dr Sam Wells speaks of 'Neville's imagination, energy and tender heart'. The reader is invited to do likewise by reflecting on the challenging questions at the end of every chapter.

40 years of ministry in Liverpool - Neville Black

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NEVILLE BLACK

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**40 YEARS' INNER
CITY MINISTRY TO
THE CHURCHES AND
COMMUNITIES OF
LIVERPOOL**

Rev. Canon Neville Black, M.B.E.

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FOREWORD

by Sam Wells

Neville Black is a social and ecclesial entrepreneur. He has spent his life on border between the church that is and the church that could be. Most people think of the church as an institution: dependable, durable, wise, hospitable – but static, backward-looking, slow to change, elitist and self-satisfied. Neville has never thought of the church as an institution; he thinks of it more as an insurgency. He understands people's need for abiding signals and habits of constancy, for needing people and things to rely on: but he's never found much of that in the gospels, where he's perceived a message of a realm of God breaking in. Neville wants to be part of that burglary – that break-in: it might make a mess, it might tread on toes, but it's what the Holy Spirit is doing, and he's always wanted to be part of it. And to be fair, Neville would tread on toes whether he meant to or not.

This is a story of how Neville's imagination, energy, and tender heart grew from childhood hardship and evangelical piety to empowered leadership and finally visionary entrepreneurship. There are always at least two stories going on: one amid adversity, with considerable challenges, the need to support those closest to him, the class and regional prejudice and small-mindedness of the church; the other of creativity, resilience, effervescent inventiveness, infectious kindness and generous embrace. And the third story is of Neville and the Trinity – fired with the Spirit, walking humbly with Jesus, captivated by the Father – yet wrestling like Jacob, seeking who he really is and who God really is.

I imagine most who read this will know and love Neville already. I for one owe him more than I can ever describe or detail. But I'm sure that all who read this will know and love Neville by the time they finish. Because this is a man who has allowed the Spirit to sing a song in his heart. And because of Neville, we will never forget how that song goes.

Rev Dr Samuel Wells is Vicar of St-Martin-in-the-Fields and visiting professor of Christian Ethics at King's College, London. He has published 35 books

Bradstock review of '40 Years of Ministry'.

This is both a primer in urban ministry, and a frank, heartwarming account of an exceptional parish priest and follower of Jesus.

If urban ministry is still in the 'too hard' basket for many in the Church, this book suggests why. To be effective it requires less a seminary 'training' than a commitment to root oneself in a community, get alongside people where they are, and innovate and reassess continually. Vision, enthusiasm, and a determination to succeed also help, and while the author has these, he can also acknowledge his mistakes and shortcomings.

As an evangelical ministering in the inner-city, Black had to re-think his theology early on: to see salvation as relevant both to individuals and 'communities like Liverpool 8', to prioritise 'kingdom' over church, to commit to 'going out to' rather than 'bringing or fetching in'. If that was unremarkable, it's the stories Black tells, as he works all this out, that make this book: the response of a conservative priest when asked if salvation might be anything but 'personal', the reaction of evangelical church members to those wanting to help but not necessarily believe or join the church. 'I had to learn that mission was not about me confronting people about their need for God, but God leading people to take tentative steps towards a church community', Black writes.

So here is no detached overview of urban ministry, rather conversational-style anecdotes and pen portraits, bringing to life the communities the writer knew and tensions he discovered and sought to resolve within them. Black's love for the city in which he ministered for forty years is clear, and the ground-level stories he relates about its tensions, including those between the police and the black community, are telling. The latter famously spilled over in Toxteth, where Black was serving at the time. Black's role in ministry initiatives, such as the Evangelical Urban Training Project (now Unlock), are also discussed, as is his clearly fulfilling marriage.

From a self-confessed man of action, this is a remarkably reflective book. There are constant references to 'the benefit of hindsight', and 'questions for reflection' to end each chapter. Black's comments on the bishops he worked with are revealing;

Blanch and Jones come out well, David Sheppard less so, with class difference clearly a factor. Hilary Russell once observed that Sheppard's contribution to Liverpool came from his being rooted in and identified with the city, while 'to some extent above the fray'. Black's comes from being very firmly in the fray, out of which he has written an absorbing and inspiring memoir.

This is an extract from David's email to Neville Feb '24 regarding Neville's book

You came to lead a session at St John's College Nottingham on inner-city ministry in 1978, which was inspirational and led to my wife Hilary and I being called to work in the inner-city. We spent nine years in Deptford, SE London, then nearly five years on a housing estate in Coventry, and after 12 years living in the very middle of Exeter went to the centre of Bradford to be at the cathedral for nearly seven years; and finished by taking what we'd learned to apply at St Paul's Cathedral, which was the most difficult gig of all, retiring 18 months ago. We are so grateful to you for helping us on our ministry journey, rethinking the middle-class white academic evangelical theology we'd learnt (I found Ken Leech really helpful with that) and developing sacramental and embodied ministry; and look forward to hearing about your own experiences.

All good wishes and every blessing,

David Ison

David John Ison, KCVO is a retired Church of England priest. From 2012 until he retired in 2022, he was the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in the Diocese of London.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to share my experiences of life at its varying stages and from time to time pause to reflect on significant turns and twists in that journey in order to assess the effect of that experience or encounter in shaping my life. At the end of each chapter, the reader is invited to similarly pause and reflect, using the questions suggested as a starting point.

I want to place on record my thanks to many people in the preparation of this book, not least Harvey Dodgson and Michael Morris who have patiently edited, proof-read and made suggestions for improvement over many months.

Proceeds from the sale of this book will be given to Liverpool's Docklands Trail charity, which you can learn more about in the last chapter of this book, and at <https://docklandstrail.co.uk>.

Nevile Black

May 2023



CHAPTER ONE

Early life

My journey into life began on St Mark's Day 1936 in Bootle, Merseyside. I was born the eighth child to Jack and Elsie Black, although two of my elder sisters had died in infancy. Jack was a haulage contractor following in the tracks of his father, and Elsie was a housewife.

Shortly after my birth my father sadly contracted tuberculosis, which exposed him and those around him to a long journey of deteriorating health leading to his early death at 42, a month before the outbreak of the second world war. I was barely 3 when he died.

Despite being so young when I lost my father, I have retained some strong and lasting memories of how that period of suffering affected me in shaping my understanding of waiting and loss: I will return to this much later in this account.

I understand from my family that my birth was a difficult one! After all, it was the eighth pregnancy and my mother was 38, so the story goes that her labour was considerably drawn out. She was exhausted and her survival was threatened. At birth, the midwife thought I had died in the birth canal, and so I was simply wrapped in a towel, and put on a table while mother was attended to. Lo and behold I must have moved, which drew the comment 'the little *****'s alive!

When this story was related to Val once she had become immersed in Clinical Theology, she said that this ‘primal episode’ may have accounted for some dominant traits in my later life

- never on time
- always in a hurry
- often coming in late but first to leave early
- a male Martha [doer] rather than a male Mary [be-er]
- always wanting to take the first step
- spontaneous commentator rather than considered reflector

The readers of this book will form their own opinions: several have related their experiences of their first encounter with me! I was never afraid to blurt something out, as I once did to Nick Frayling when he was appointed to a Canonry at the Cathedral as yet another Southwark Diocese import during the Sheppard Dynasty: ‘What difference are you going to make in Liverpool coming up from the South?’; or when Archbishop Runcie came to meet the Toxteth Chapter within weeks of the Riots in 1981: ‘Archbishop, what do you honestly think you’d say to us here from Lambeth Palace?’.

My active memories start when our family moved into a terraced house at Gloucester Road, Bootle, after two earlier moves from nearby Stanley Road and Hawthorne Road in anticipation of the lesser life style that would be imposed on them after my father’s death. The family business had been improving as my father progressed from using horses for haulage to using motor vehicles. I can remember a family holiday in Gronnant near Prestatyn, where the family rented a timber holiday chalet for the whole of the school holidays. Older sisters later explained that the family would stay there for several weeks, with some of them having friends to accompany them; father would come each weekend with Jack my eldest brother (by now involved in the family business) to bring new grocery supplies for the week ahead. I remember my fascination with the passing steam engines that pulled coaches going to and from London to Holyhead; I remember returning waves to some of the engine drivers as they passed our chalet; and I remember one or

two journeys in my father’s wagon. with me sitting on his knees as he drove along. There were other memorable journeys in the open boot of the family’s Jowett car, together with two elder sisters wrapped in an eiderdown to keep us warm as we raced along. Again, I remember an Easter Day walk into nearby Derby Park with him...and on another occasion I remember walking with Min and Ron (my brother & sister) to the Fever Hospital in Linacre Lane to visit him. We were denied access to the ward because of the risk of infection, and so we resorted to a compromise: he would go to the boundary wall of the hospital and talk to us as we stood on the outside pavement...and again I remember father’s friends coming each night to sit with him through the night to relieve mother.

My mother was blessed by the friendship offered by Kate Mesham who was a single, unmarried woman with a daughter Isobel who met my elder sister Min at Christ Church School. I’m told that soon after my father’s death Ron and Min were deputed to take me for an afternoon outing to South Road Waterloo (accessed by the L3 bus route). From South Road you could access the extensive coast line alongside the Mersey. At some point I’d wandered off. Min and Ron sensed I was lost and started combing the many other families enjoying a day on the sands; sometime later they found me sitting with Kate and Isobel enjoying an ice cream! Min was distraught by this time as it meant getting home late. Kate kindly offered to come with the returning family to explain to my mother the reason for the late return. Kate became a wonderful friend and support to my mother and me to the point that she became quite involved in some of the domestic chores in our family routine, especially after Maisie, Ron and Min were all evacuated in late 1941 and I was alone at home with mother. As mother had to leave the house to go to work and open the newsagents, Downings on Hawthorne Road, at 6.30am I had to get myself ready for school. Kate would become heavily involved in that routine until I was older and able to undertake that routine without help. A close bond formed between Kate and Isobel at this time, not least because Isobel was not evacuated from the city. This

bond persisted especially whilst I was at Christ Church school up to 1947. Kate introduced me to the Sunday School at Christ Church Mission Church which was opposite 18 Waterworks Street. She was deeply committed to the Mission and attended the weekly evening services there. I joined the robed choir when I was about 7, and remained a member until my mid-teens.

Kate's love and care of me forged a deep bond and on reflection played a profound influence on my own childhood enculturation into the Christian faith for which I have remained grateful throughout my life. She was left to struggle to raise Isobel as a single mother, which in the tight knit community of Bootle Village was very impressive.

All these fleeting memories have been stored meticulously for nearly 80 years, and they enable me to retain special memories of a father who died when I was only three years and a few months.

My next cluster of memory surrounds the outbreak of war - the blitz and our family's attempts to escape the heavy bombing which Bootle suffered. Our escape route was via one of our wagons, draped by a large tarpaulin sheet canopy over the back. Once the sirens hailed their warning of an impending attack my brother Jack, out at his girlfriend's, would hurriedly drive the wagon to Gloucester Road where our family plus some neighbours would scramble into the back and make our way to the safety of Huyton, where we would seek refuge in the reinforced brick shelters into which people gathered. On reflection, I never sensed any resentment towards these incomers from Bootle, but that seemed to be the amazing community spirit that pervaded at the time. En route to and from Bootle today, I can still see the red glow of the fires that enveloped buildings that had been bombed. On returning after the sirens declared the 'all clear' we would journey back and mother would always say 'Thank God' when the wagon turned the corner of Worcester Road and we could see that our house remained intact. Bootle attracted a great deal of hostile enemy action because of the strategic importance of the port and the docks. The greatest damage in our immediate

neighbourhood was caused to Williamsons' Toffee Works lower down Waterworks St which was gutted. Local children looted many tins of burnt toffee!!

This period caused havoc to the cohesion of our family: first, Jack the eldest son was conscripted to HM Forces; he joined the army and was soon despatched to the Middle East, then Italy, before ending up in Germany where he remained until 1947. Joyce chose to enlist in the Auxiliary Fire Service and was stationed in Liverpool so as to remain nearby to give mother and the family her support. Maisie, Ron and Min were first evacuated to Southport, and later Maisie went to Hereford with the Girls' Secondary School, and Min went to Olive Watkins, a widow running 'Shawls Farm', a small 60-acre farm in Craswall near Hereford in the idyllic 'Golden Valley'.

The family business collapsed after Jack joined the army. Mother had to rethink her route to economic survival. As a young woman who had enjoyed a secondary education at Queen Mary High School, Anfield, she had enlisted in the Wrens during the first World War and was employed in the Civil Service in Liverpool. Sadly, her options were more limited in 1942 in view of the need to care for me, still only 6 years of age. She decided to be a part-time shop assistant in Downings, the newsagent & tobacconist in Hawthorne Road, a mere 50 yards from our home.

At this time, money was very tight; the situation wasn't helped by my father's inability to maintain his national insurance contributions during the tough years of the 1930s. At his death she received no widows' pension, and this remained the situation until 1958 when she became 60 years of age. In the absence of the National Health Service, the family's meagre savings, and then the sale of furniture, went to meet medical fees to support my father in his three-year battle with tuberculosis. This meant we lived in relative poverty during this difficult time, though both Jack and Joyce contributed to the family's needs from their

earnings. We survived on a wing and a prayer, although the collective moral determination of the family to get over this difficult period more than compensated for the enforced financial difficulties.

Min's evacuation to Shawls Farm impacted greatly on me as I was able to spend school holidays there. Olive Watkins was immensely brave and courageous in her own battle against adversity enforced through the loss of husband and father to her only son, Trevor, who was only 14 at the outbreak of war.

The farmhouse and its rural setting was idyllic, although very primitive by today's standards. I don't think that the farm had mains gas or electricity. There was a small paraffin stove for cooking, and one day per week the boiler in the wash house was lit for the weekly wash. Olive used the oven in the boiler to do the weekly bake consisting of wonderful large white loaves, cakes etc. From time to time whole sides of pig were bought, treated with salt, and then wrapped in a muslin cloth and stored on special hooks in the kitchen. From these, slices of bacon were cut for various meals. Olive kept about 5 or 6 cows that were milked twice per day, and the milk was consumed by the family. When I was there, she would pour out glasses of the morning's milk, and these stood in the very cool pantry until the evening meal - by which time it had gathered a rich cream top that was considered to be very healthy for young children. The pantry was an annex that had been built on to the back of the farm house, under which a stream flowed, and above which a huge york stone slab had been laid; together, they contributed to maintaining a very cool atmosphere quite suitable for a cool room. Again, on a regular basis fresh butter was made in a churn in the pantry. It was quite a job turning the churn until the milk solidified into creamy, home-made farmhouse butter. Min and I used to love 'patting' the butter with special wooden implements with 'wrinkled' patterns on the wood which gave the butter beautiful shapes and patterns.

Lighting for downstairs came from brass paraffin lamps with elegant glass globes that had to be kept clean. Upstairs was lit by candle light treated with great care; the candles would be quickly extinguished once we were in bed under enormous feather filled eiderdowns. We washed from large bowls kept in each bedroom with a large stone jug. The toilet was outside, down the garden, and again placed conveniently over the running stream that had made its way behind the house into a submerged tunnel that fed into the garden. Each week, a sterilising fluid was emptied to maintain some level of acceptable sanitation. Despite many inconveniences Shawls retains a magical idyll for me.

These limited exposures to this rural setting impacted greatly on my developing imagination and gave me a rural memory store which contrasted to the inner-city urban setting of Bootle.

Whilst the rest of my family were making their journeys of life away from our home in Bootle, I was embarking on a developing life in Bootle, beginning with my enrolment at Christ Church School two blocks away from my home. I vividly remember my first day in the infants' department that was organised into two classes under the Infant head, Mrs Dougherty, and Miss Stubbs. Mrs Dougherty wore a light blue tweed costume with high collar, silk blouse and pearl necklace. She was softly spoken and gentle in manner, and seemed unperturbed at another new entrant, Miss Catherine Bullen, who had refused to take off her new purple coat and hat and sobbed her way through the entire day. Given the protective climate surrounding care and protection of children today, it is remarkable that on day two and all the remaining days I was able to walk to and from school at the age of 5 unaccompanied by an adult, and this continued throughout my attendance at Christ Church School up until I left in 1947.

The old school building still stands but it was sold to the Bootle YMCA when a new school was built on the Christ Church Mission site in Waterworks Street. Christ Church School was a two-form combined Infant Junior School that enjoyed remarkable stable staff throughout my

time from 1941-1947. Headmaster was Mr Johnson, deputy Mr Patterson, and then Mr Williams, Miss Roberts, Mr Horne, Miss Hall, and the two Miss Wilsons, whilst the infants were served by Mrs Dougherty and Miss Stubbs. The school had hard surface play areas, and outside toilets. About half of the two top class children passed the scholarship to the Boys' and Girls' Grammar Schools.

My life in Bootle was almost confined to a 500-metre circle which contained schools, church, park and shops. The shops were centred at the cross roads of Hawthorne Road and Waterworks Street, where there was a chip shop run by the Harrisons, 2 Greengrocers run by Jerry Mills and Mrs Davies, Irwins' grocers, Taylors the bakers, a barber's owned by Ray Turpin, and a Bicycle shop which also recharged the battery accumulators for the radios – then called wirelasses. Lewis the butchers was on the next corner up Hawthorne Road, and the Co-op dairy was on the next corner down Hawthorne Road, whilst the pub, The Albion, was lower down. The Post Office was a little lower down again than the Albion.

The weekly schedule for shopping was dominated by the placing of the order to Irwins; the order was written out on Wednesday night and handed in so that it would be available for collection on Thursday or Friday. The layout in the interior of the shop was fascinating by today's standards - the counter would lie behind a series of boxes or wooden containers in which would be displayed whole quantities of tea, sugar, dried fruit, biscuits, broken biscuits, large uncut blocks of butter, cheese etc. The shop assistants would spend hours weighing and packaging pound and half pound weights of the material for inclusion in the orders to be delivered to customers. By contrast, the fish and chip shop would hardly vary from contemporary shops where there were large containers for the hot fat to boil and cook the chips, the fish, fish cakes, and scallops; when chips were ready, they were ladelled onto a sheet of greaseproof paper on the counter. The fish would be placed on top of

the chips, and the parcel was then wrapped in newspaper. This process continues today. The big change is the extended menu now available from Chinese and Greek sources.

I had two sets of childhood networks: the one revolved around my class group at Christ Church School and singularly Eddie Harwood, with whom I often played after school before my mum returned home from work after 6pm. Eddie would invite me to his attractive terraced cottage on Litherland Road, which enjoyed the great luxury of a small front garden, and a rear garden that backed onto the banks of the Leeds Liverpool Canal. There was a small plot of open land behind his house and the canal where we played safely until tea time when I would return home. Eddie's elder brother Harry was in the Scouts at Ash Street Baptist Church and encouraged Eddie to join the cubs there; he in turn invited me and another set of boys from our class - Bob Price, Robin Prescott, Tom Pritchard. Interestingly, all these boys joined me at the Grammar School later in 1947.

The other network came from the surrounding streets, and included Peter Griffiths, Tommy Cardwell, Maxi Mills, Joey Travis and others. Access to the park was unlimited as the iron railings had been removed for the 'war effort' but there was enough space for games of football and cricket, fishing for tiddlers in the lake, and the use of the slide and swings. If we didn't feel like going to the park we could play cricket using the lamp post base for a wicket or the gable wall of Mrs Gill's house for our goal for street football – more often played with a tennis ball rather than a regular size football, not in plentiful supply during the war years. Occasionally, we would venture away from home territory in three directions – on the L3 Ribble bus from Stanley Road to Waterloo, and/or Crosby beaches (which incidentally were still covered by small pyramids of concrete, and 8 foot high poles to prevent enemy aircraft landing), or on the 72 bus to Sefton Church where there was a 'wishing well' and a pond on the farmer's field that had bull rushes on it and the flour mill, or very occasionally on the 60 bus to the cast iron shore at Otterspool.

This needs a fuller explanation, because with the benefit of hindsight this was the cradle for my journey into religious faith and practice.

The Mission in my time was run by Church Army Captains who were on the staff of the Parish of Christ Church, but who were assigned to the specific ministry of the Bootle Village community. It is worth giving a simple background to the creation of Mission Churches/Halls in the Diocese of Liverpool: the programme of mission church building was initiated by Bishop Ryle when he became the first bishop of the new diocese of Liverpool when it was carved out of Chester Diocese in 1880. Ryle quickly grasped that the working communities in Liverpool were massively underrepresented in the established congregations of parish churches. Interestingly most had a pattern of evening services only as this suited the pattern of working-class life and many workers still worked a five and a half, or even six, day week. Sunday was their only time to have a lie in, or to have space to recover from Saturday evening reparations in the local pub! The Mission comprised of a small but traditional church with altar, pulpit, lectern, choir stalls, and wooden pews in the nave.

In addition, there was a decent sized adjacent hall plus a small house for a resident minister. During the war the services were run by the curate Rev Moss, until a Church Army Officer, Captain Hudson, was appointed. He did not live in the house at the mission since it had fallen in to disrepair. He was replaced by Capt Percy Kierle from about 1943 when the situation changed radically, as Percy was determined to regenerate the Mission status and influence in the Bootle Village Community. He recruited a small band of men from the community and within months the house was decorated and restored sufficiently for him to live in despite it remaining to be damp! He restored the hall and the Mission began to hum with new life and energy. Percy was from Somerset, had energy and enthusiasm and was certainly an influence for good in my young life. The choir was reintroduced with robes of cassock and surplice, and there were annual performances of Olivet to Calvary from the meagre combined voices of only 10-15 choristers. He

even introduced the rural pattern of beating the bounds of the parish at rogationtide – but to be authentic for Percy that meant walking around fields! And as they were not any in our parish, we located the allotments in Orrell and walked around them singing hymns and stopping for times of prayer. It was novel and also instructive about wider horizons than those in down town Bootle. I have two very vivid memories of Capt Kierle's influence on me. Percy gathered a small group of boys around him, and from time to time we were invited to have a talk about simple Christian discipleship followed by a discussion. On one evening he put on the radio to listen to the news bulletins which were announcing that Archbishop Temple was dying. Percy greatly admired William Temple and he asked us to join him as he prayed for The Church at this sad and difficult time.

Not long afterwards Percy left the parish and became Warden of St George's Crypt in Leeds. He arranged for four of that group, Gordon Rowe, Alan Dixon, Bob Spencer and me to visit him in Leeds for a few days, from memory it must have been in about 1947/8. It was quite momentous for me. We stayed with a Mrs Appleyard who laid down very strict rules about how we should behave in her house, but she proved to be very kind and hospitable. Percy laid on a whole series of visits around St George's parish, and one in particular sticks in my memory: we were allowed to visit the actual print shop of the Yorkshire Post, where the type was set by hand, and the skilled print setters selected individual metal letters to make up the words of the text. They set the material upside down, and then they were set in column widths, with larger letters being used for headlines, and each page of the newspaper was set in a special format. Once the whole page was set – a copy was pressed onto a large soft cardboard sheet and placed into a machine which was in turn placed onto a large round drum. Eventually, this cardboard cast was used to make a soft metal cast that was fixed to a large metal drum, which eventually became the printing press for each page. It was a long process and involved several skilled typesetters and printers working as a team to produce each edition of the paper.

Whilst we watched in amazement at this process, the foreman chatted to us, and then sent off a teletext to the paper's London Office explaining that there was a small group of boys from Bootle visiting their Leeds factory. We again watched as the teletext printer chatted away, and soon a reply from London was received wishing the boys from Bootle well, and commenting that the word was that 'Bootle was that place where bugs wore clogs'! Once the paper started to be printed, we were given the cardboard cast to take home as a memento. On the next day, Percy took us to meet the Vicar, Tony Waite, and his wife before we were taken to Headingley to watch the cricket. His wife had carefully prepared a food hamper for our lunch, and when it was opened I discovered sandwiches beautifully prepared without crusts – a first introduction to the gentility of middle class life in vicarages – more of that later in this saga !

Finally, Percy showed us St George's Crypt where he worked. It had been started by Rev Don Robins, who had been a RAF pilot during the war, who had had a vision of the need to provide practical help for many ex- servicemen who on discharge to civilian life fell onto hard times outside the rigours of the disciplined life in the armed forces. The Crypt provided the men with a bed and a simple breakfast, a chance to bath, and some fresh clothing before they were discharged. It seemed very little but it was a very meaningful overnight stop gap. I was to become more acquainted with the work of the Crypt later in my journey as my first Vicar, Richard Allen had two spells of deployment as Warden of the Crypt in the early 60s and then early 70s.

As I reflect on my journey of life with the benefit of hindsight, I trace a pattern of creative episodes, which like a tapestry have been woven to shape a larger pattern of my own spiritual pilgrimage.

The opportunity to reflect on my schooldays' friendship patterns reveal a dichotomy between school networks and neighbourhood friendship patterns, where the one took hegemony over the other. That the group of boys who joined the cubs from school all aspired to the

new opportunities of a grammar school education, whereas only one or two from the neighbourhood group pursued that route, exposes a feature of working class life that showed the pull of the 'group over the individual'; where and when the individual makes that choice to leave the group behind forces the aspiring individual to espouse a new life style, culture, and set of values that are in sharp contrast to the originating group culture of working class life. I will reflect at much greater length on this feature when I reflect on my 're-entry' to working class culture when I started my ministry in Everton years later.

My life in the grammar school was not particularly happy, because I sense that I under achieved. Again, reflection and analysis is helpful. The under-achievement seems to have been linked to the emotional impedance of 'loss' which had become part of my sub script since the loss of my father. It reappeared in 1947 when in the year that I joined the grammar school my brother Ron, who had become my surrogate father and support joined the regular army, and support at home weakened. In my first set of exams I came a respectable 9th in class, but in the second set I was 22nd, and fell into the lower set that was to limit both the scope of the syllabus and the aspirations both within the class and by the school towards the lower band; sadly this reflects the educational thrust of the post war grammar school movement. Undoubtedly there were some exceedingly bright students in the top group of my cohort to the extent that in about 1956 five boys succeeded in gaining places at Cambridge. However, all was not lost: after poor results from my 'O' level exams in 1952 I had the opportunity to join a resit group in the sixth form and was tutored by a remarkably gifted teacher Dermot Murray who coached our set to achieve a reasonable set of exam successes the year after. I regarded this time as a second chance and a springboard to higher aspirations later.

It was in this year that my life was turned upside down as I came to personal faith in a most dramatic way, as I was 'converted to Christ' on Friday 3rd January 1953.

Inevitably there was a process with several interesting components that led up to this momentous experience. My brother Ron returned home from serving in the army and perhaps restored for me a stronger emotional support within my home environment. I discovered more personal confidence in having extracted my front top teeth, severely disfigured from my early primary school years and which went untreated at the Liverpool Dental hospital because mother couldn't afford the time from work to accompany me to the long period that orthodontic realignment would have incurred. I was acutely aware throughout my teenage years of my odd looks. The new denture gave me a brand-new confidence.

From about 1951 I had reconnected with Bobby, Alan and Gordon who had been with me to Leeds years previously as we all became involved in the Mission Church in Waterworks Street, where we became Sunday School teachers. Bill Henderson, a little older than us, had returned from National Service in the RAF and was a devoted Christian who gave us great encouragement, which led to his suggestion that Gordon and I should consider filling the vacancy on the Deanery Sunday School Committee. We decided that somebody should else should decide which one of us should be selected, and as a result we were invited to go and meet a senior member of that Deanery Committee in the adjacent parish of St. John and James, Litherland on Friday 3rd January 1953. We were invited to attend a prayer meeting there first and meet Ken Ellis afterwards.

I had never attended a prayer meeting before. I was amazed at the atmosphere and was deeply drawn into the spirit of it, even to the point of wanting to pray, but not having the confidence to do so. Clearly this was a significant pre-liminal phase to what was to follow. I was emotionally ready to enquire more deeply into this spiritual ambiance. Gordon and I engaged in earnest conversation with Ken who outlined clearly his understanding and experience of His own spiritual conversion some years earlier. I was open and ready to seek this for myself. Gordon and I walked home with 'burning hearts' profoundly moved by the conversa-

tion with Ken. I went to my bedroom, knelt by my bedside and prayed that Jesus Christ would be my personal saviour, and come into my life. It was the deepest emotional experience that I had ever encountered and immediately and profoundly changed my entire life. My best way of describing this experience is to imagine a blind person gaining the instant ability to read Braille, and being handed a Bible in Braille and having instant insight. I was filled with a profound sense of joy, a new sense of the presence and nearness of the living Christ, an eagerness to pray, and a thirst to read the bible, which came alive as I engaged with the words and deeds of Jesus in the gospels.

I had a deep urge to share this experience with those around me. Gordon had experienced a conversion like me, and within another few weeks Alan and Bob also experienced conversions. Church Army Captain Herbert Sharman was a massive encourager of us as a group, and the Mission was alive with the sound of Gospel music. It provided an ideal welcoming culture for us to blossom and flourish in our new found faith. Certainly, it was a genuine 'turning upside down and inside out' for me. Amazingly in the same months I was to meet my wife Val at a square dance organised by our sister Girls' Grammar School, where the fifth form there invited the sixth form at the Boys' school to join them on this occasion. I spotted this pretty girl with white blouse and red skirt wearing the small green badge of the Scripture Union. I immediately asked her, as I did most people I met in those days 'are you a Christian?' Her affirmative response meant an immediate attraction for me.

The 18 months between conversion in January 1953, and the beginning of my National Service in the RAF in Oct 1954 proved to be most eventful period for me. Leaving school with GCEs, getting my first job as a junior clerk in Liverpool City Council, passing the Civil service exam and joining the Inland Revenue as a trainee Income Tax Officer, participating in a most vigorous Christian fellowship at Christ Church mission, and consolidating my relationship with Val established some creative formation in simple Christian ministry involving prayer meet-

ings, bible studies, evangelistic witness teams, leading and preaching at a weekly service at the Home for the Blind all provided me with a great sense of personal fulfilment.

Questions for reflection

Clearly, the 'experience of loss' became an important subtext to the development of my emotional life, which acted as a catalyst to my seeking to find in God a new adopted father

Have you as a reader any similar early-years experiences which have shaped your own spiritual formation?

Kate Mesham, Captain Percy Keirle and Dermont Murray played important shaping influences in my young life, for which I remain grateful.

Who are the important people to give thanks for in your early years?

The tension between individual aspiration and group conformity were obviously evident in my early years.

As reader, can you identify similar tensions or clashes of loyalty in your early years? If so, how do you appraise that tension in later years?



CHAPTER TWO

Call to ministry

The next stage of my life journey began in October 1954 with my conscription to National Service in the RAF. I was initially despatched to RAF Cardington to be enrolled and equipped, but after very few days I was sent to RAF Hednesford for 'square bashing'. The first great challenge to me was how was I going to bear simple personal Christian witness? This took the form of reading my Bible and then kneeling at my bedside to pray. It wasn't easy but I never received any ridicule or hostility. The schedule for learning to drill, attend lectures, and assessment interviews for trade selection absorbed every minute of the working day, whilst the evenings were given to 'spit and polish' of boots and other aspects of uniform tidiness, and preparing my bedspace, locker, and bed for the very regular inspections from the NCOs in charge of our unit. I coped reasonably well with the routine, and the new demand to achieve physical and mental fitness. We were not allowed any leave during this initial six-week period. I still have very vivid memories of the magnificent November dawn rising over the downs of Cannock Chase. Our passing out parade was abandoned because of bad weather, and so I arrived back in Liverpool firmly established as AC Black 273088 to be inspected by friends and family in my new uniform. I was able to spend Christmas with my girlfriend Val and

our families, and to be reunited with the Christian fellowship at Christ Church Mission, having learnt that I had been assigned to begin training as an RAF Nurse at RAF Freckleton, near Lytham St Anne's.

Arriving at RAF Freckleton was 'mind boggling': we were accommodated in Nissan huts with about 20 airmen in each; having unpacked, the hut door sprang open and everybody jumped to attention as the station Flight Sergeant Nicholson emerged; he asked for me by name.....I was dumbstruck, especially by the conversation which followed during which I was quizzed about my membership of SASRA (Soldiers and Airmen's Scripture Readers' Association), and also about the nature of my Christian faith. It proved to be a most effective way of helping me to establish my Christian credentials to my new colleagues within the hut, and made the threshold of saying prayers at my bedside easier to cross. There was a weekly SASRA meeting attended by over 70 airmen. The training was exacting and culminated in the need to pass the trade exam at the conclusion of the course, which I was able to do. I was duly posted to 214 MU at RAF Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, and took my place on the staff of the Station Sick Quarters, which had its own Dispensary and 9 bed ward, together with a Dental Clinic. The Sick Quarters had to be staffed 24/7 which meant being on duty every other night, and every other weekend. In a sense it was quite restrictive. My rigid evangelical lifestyle - teetotal, non cinema-going should have isolated me further from my colleagues, but they showed me great understanding and toleration. It was a happy unit, where we all pulled together. I was also enabled to participate in sports and was privileged to play for the station rugby team.

Val, my girlfriend, continued to give me great support as we shared our commitment to the Christian faith which was becoming more central to our shared life. It was in the summer of 1955 that we decided to apply to join the youth house party at St John and James going to the Keswick Convention. We were enthralled by many aspects of this long-established forum for deepening the Christian life, but in particu-

lar by the morning daily Bible Reading, that year led by Dr. Donald Barnhouse. This was followed by the Young People's Meeting led by Rev LEF Wilkinson, the principal of Oak Hill theological college in London. During the missionary meeting on the final Friday morning of the convention, an invitation was made to any who were feeling called to enter full time ministry.

Both Val and I stood to make that public statement of a growing personal conviction that we were being drawn to follow. We made an appointment to see LEF Wilkinson to discuss the implications of this course of action, as we shared the view that this might lead to my seeking ordination into full time ministry in the Church of England. At the time, it seemed to be the natural thing to do in response to our shared inner call. LEF spelt out the stages involved: first the need to seek the nomination and support of our diocesan Bishop, Dr Clifford Martin; to attend a selection conference; to gain entrance qualifications for university admission, and to undertake theological training. We felt undaunted by the long journey ahead, the start of which would effectively be timed by my starting at university. But, there was a serious and genuine issue: the need for me with my other brothers and sisters to maintain my widowed mother financially until she would draw her state pension when she was 60 in October 1958.

I returned to my unit, arranged to meet the education section and enrolled to start a two advanced level GCE course as an external student at the extra mural department of the University of Education with all costs of tuition and travel fully met by the RAF. I negotiated with the Liverpool Diocese to attend a selection conference which later followed in Manchester and gained acceptance conditional upon gaining university entrance. It was recommended that I should read PPE at Durham University with theological training to follow at Cranmer Hall. Val and I were duly called to visit the Bishop at the Bishop's Lodge following the selection conference; sadly, we were both devastated to hear of the Bishop's schedule of the route before us. He was emphatic that he would not consent to our being married until I had completed a curacy, which

by our reckoning at the fastest route would have been almost 10 years hence - 1966. It was a body blow. Although I completed my first year of Advanced Level studies at Birmingham in June 1956, and achieved reasonable grades, after only one year of study I was thrown into a major dilemma about the way forward. Val and I had a rethink. I wondered whether I could consider doing medicine and chatted it over with the RAF station Medical Officer who encouraged me to give it a go. The real attraction was it would allow us to marry much sooner. With the benefit of hindsight it was a mistaken course of action, and showed that we lacked access to any good advice in our home situation. I ploughed on in my own determined way. After the RAF, I returned to the Inland Revenue, and then resigned and enrolled on a one-year Advanced Level course to do the science level subjects, but failed. Val and I then felt we should press on. We married at Easter 1960 after I had gained a job working in the Personal Taxation Department of Martin's Bank. I wasn't settled: our shared sense of a call to full time ministry persisted. Again, we had to seek the Bishop's permission, since there had been a five-year gap from my earlier selection conference. I went again in November 1960, and was recommended for training to commence in October 1961. I secured a place at Oak Hill College in London, where the much respected LEF Wilkinson was principal. Another eventful visit to the Bishop followed. He 'insisted' that I should study in London and Val remain in Liverpool! He suggested that it would be useful for her to consider working at a newly created hostel for overseas students, World Friendship House, in Liverpool 8. It was run by Sidney Goddard, who had accepted the challenge to create a hostel, initially by raising money to purchase the adjacent property to his rather hitherto grand Georgian terrace vicarage at no 5 Falkner Square.

We went to see Sidney and his wife Cicely on New Year's Eve 1960. We were mesmerised by his passion and vision. The conjoined houses were an amazing labyrinth of student bedsits, a chapel, a library, makeshift flats for staff, that had been put together by him as Mr DIY (he had been a joiner before ordination). We became so engrossed in the con-

versation that we missed our bus home and had to walk the seven-mile journey back to our flat in Bootle. We were transfixed by the situation. We moved in within 3 weeks: Val resigned from the Civil Service and became the bursar of the hostel, whilst I remained at the bank. I offered to help in the small Boys' Brigade Company at St Saviour's Falkner Square and duly became a warrant officer one night, and a helper at the Youth Club run from the basement hall beneath the church. We fell in love with the place and the many challenges that it threw up. Whereas we had been focused earlier on becoming overseas missionaries, it was here that we were drawn to the challenge of ministry and mission within the inner city.

Liverpool 8 in 1960 was a ghetto where the Liverpool Black Community had settled after several waves of immigration spread well over a century. When I was in the Inland Revenue I had been allocated the Schedule D taxation work of Parish 12, which was essentially the Falkner Square Community, where there were still small pockets of professionals and academics living in the accommodation which had been preserved still in the grandeur and style of upper middle class 19th Century living in Gambier Terrace, Rodney Street, Hope Street, and Blackburn Terrace. But, great swathes of the magnificent Georgian property had seen very serious decline, and had become overrun by Rachmanite multi-occupancy properties, where as many as five or six families would live in each large house and where makeshift kitchens and toilets were fitted on each floor. Conditions were desperate. My work in the Revenue revealed the landlords making a fortune from furnished lettings and illegal shabeens [drinking dens]. Prostitution was rife, and yet this was the 'stuff of inner-city ministry' where there was still dignity and pride to be found among the indigenous community which both World Friendship House and St Saviour's Church felt called to serve as best they could. We caught some of Sidney Goddard's passion. It wasn't easy.

The Youth Club was led by Joyce Lloyd, assisted by some white Christian students based at the Hostel alongside Joe Steen, John Renwick and myself. Some of the very tough older teenagers used to play a game which I found very frightening. They would coax some of their younger brothers to tease and tantalise the students who in their exasperation would shout at and push the youngsters away. At this signal, the older brothers would move across, whilst one of them would turn all the lights out: then the fights would start. As this was a regular occurrence, the youth leader would have a runner ready to flee to the Vicarage to ring the police for help, to come and restore order, whereupon the club would close for the night, and the students would retreat to bathe and dress inflicted wounds and over a restoring cuppa analyse once again the situation, gather round for prayer for God's guidance and help. It wasn't all doom and gloom. There was also a group of early teenagers from the same extended families who met on a Sunday for a chat and informal club in the Vicarage. Val and I had made use from our former Bootle parish of a weekend residential self-catering centre in Billinge, a small semi-rural village outside St Helens which we had used with our youth group work there.

We set about planning to hire this centre for our Liverpool mixed race group. It proved to be a very moving experience because the young people entered into the spirit of the weekend so fully - they volunteered for everything! They seemed to be so grateful. It was another glimpse of the inner city that was growing in our shared experience. In a way it was uncanny but we both felt that this was the work to which God was calling us. Sadly, there was one downside. Val was being asked to work well outside her brief as bursar/administer - to do cleaning, cooking, babysitting as well as visiting within the parish. Those close to us raised the alarm bells, especially if I was to go off to the London college, and leave her exposed to the ever-increasing demands of the place. Joan Porter was particularly concerned. She was married to a medical officer at Ashworth Prison Hospital in Maghull, outer Liverpool, and we had met her at the Roy Hession House parties at Clarendon School in

Abergele. She became involved at World Friendship House, and became increasingly close to us. She mentioned that it might be more helpful for Val if she was to seek employment at Clarendon Girls' Boarding School where there was a vacancy for a house matron. We prayed about the dilemma, consulted close friends and came to the reluctant decision that this would be the better route for Val. We left with a heavy heart. With the benefit of hindsight, we now feel that it would have been better for us to have stayed at World Friendship House together for a longer period so that we could have assimilated this new enthralling experience more fully, but it wasn't to be. And so, before we left we had a short holiday and began our respective journeys to London and North Wales.

The contrast was massive for Val from the deprivation and problems of Liverpool 8 to the magnificent rural setting of Clarendon School. The school served two contrasting communities - serving the educational needs of the children of deeply committed evangelical missionaries scattered throughout the international mission fields, alongside children of prosperous middle-class Christian families well able to afford the fees for this rather exclusive boarding school education. Clarendon was ably led by a formidable Miss Swain, who was committed to ensuring appropriate levels of educational attainment, but who was also deeply conscious of the need to provide a warm and loving atmosphere for young children and young women separated from their families. One lovely feature of this ethos was the Sunday evening story time always led by Miss Swain. The School had a wonderful annex to the main dining room where there was a huge open fire. On a Sunday evening the fire would be lit, and in subdued light the girls would sit with their nurses' type cloaks - navy on the outside and crimson red on the inside - draped around them as they listened engrossed with the story being read. The international staff shared the Christian vision of the school. Val had her own opportunity to develop her own character and personality as she left behind the narrower experience of Liverpool 8, Bootle, and her only-child family background, and she flourished in this new environment. In its own way it gave her a good grounding in pastoral care which she

would later develop in her own ministry. This location also proved to be of great benefit to me, as I was able to live and work at the school in vacations from my college in London.

As for me, theological college induction wasn't easy initially. I arrived with Bob Clarke from St Cuthbert's Everton. He was married with three boys, and like me had been directed by our Bishop to live and study apart from our wives. It was sold to us that this was a condition insisted upon by the College. We were deeply troubled to learn on arrival that several of our southern colleagues had been sanctioned to 'live out' with their wives from day one of the course. It rankled. Val and I had only been married 18 months. Another disappointment that we had to come to terms with was the death during the summer vacation of the much loved and deeply respected College Principal, the Rev LEF Wilkinson. The Rev Maurice Wood who had been the Vicar of the well-established St Mary's Islington had been appointed as principal. He had been a distinguished World War Two RNVR chaplain who had been awarded a DSC. He was a larger than life ebullient character determined to charter in a new chapter in the life of Oak Hill College which he did with great gusto. He wasn't well received by the existing student body, greatly shocked by the death of much loved 'LEF'

Maurice was determined to herald in a new era for the College and made some initial changes that deeply offended the existing college community. One was highly symbolic. LEF had insisted that the Chapel's holy table should take the form of being a typical dining room table so that The Lord's Supper would mirror that of the original upper room table around which Jesus had gathered with his disciples on the first Maundy Thursday. True to the low church and evangelical tradition, he wanted to emphasise that it wasn't an altar, but a simple table of The Lord. Maurice persuaded the Council to purchase a new wooden altar draped with cushions upon which to place the liturgical service books. Maurice steam rolled away the opposition. He also introduced new standing orders for the junior common room which were much more formal and limiting. For such an insensitive introduction to this new

ministry for him he paid a price, demonstrated at the term end college concert when almost every turn poured scorn and derision on some of his unfortunate innovations. End of term concerts were immediately stopped and not restored in my time there.

Oak Hill had been founded in the 1930s by the Kingham Hill Trust in Oxford that had earlier established a special 'vocational oriented' boarding school for poor children. Oak Hill was focused on the training of primarily mature students who had lacked academic qualifications. When I arrived in 1961 there were about 90 students, the bulk of whom had entered in their mid-twenties after some commercial or trade experience. Those entering under 25 years of age were committed to doing the three-year course, during which they were expected to pass the General Ordination Examination, which consisted of New and Old Testament Studies, Church History, Doctrine, Worship plus Homiletics and Pastoral Studies. There were some postgraduates, and senior professional people, who if they were over 30 years of age on entry were only committed to do a two-year course of study. The bulk of these had chosen Oak Hill because of its distinctive evangelical ethos.

In my first term, I was in turmoil, caused by several different factors: deeply missing Val, and struggling to come to terms with the ethos where I found myself committed to the silence and solitariness of enforced periods of quiet - in the mornings from 7.45 – 8.30 for private prayer, and again 19.00 – 21.00 for study. I had never had my own bedroom - I wasn't used to the quiet and the isolation, and I was still in the turmoil of reflecting on my time in Liverpool 8 and the many challenges and questions it had thrown up about the adequacy of my own very personal evangelical faith and its seeming lack of resonance with the issues of race, injustice, and oppression that had been the context of Liverpool 8 which I had been drawn to address. I lacked resources for creative theological reflection and critical appraisal. Nonetheless, with the benefit of hindsight it was here that my new journey and search to bridge the gap between Christian text and community context began to be initially explored.

I had been nurtured in an evangelical tradition where the givens included personal conversion to Christ, the centrality of Scripture and of belonging to a Christian worshipping group, daily prayer and bible study, and a commitment to reach out to others to win them for Christ stood alongside a teetotal, non-cinema, non-dancing life style. I came to realise how much these all of a sudden seemed to be out of sync with Liverpool 8. I couldn't articulate this incongruity but I sensed a deep unease about this growing dislocation. The first big question that arose centred around my understanding of salvation. So far it had simply focused on all people coming to a personal knowledge of Christ's redemption for them personally. I ventured out. I had met in the past through Roy Hession and the Rwanda Mission network, which had been hugely formative upon both Val and me, a certain Rev Arnold Bennet who was a vicar in St Albans, which was quite near Oak Hill. I travelled over, and still remember the astonishment on his face and demeanour when I asked him if salvation could apply not only to individuals but to communities like Liverpool 8 that I had just left? Certainly 'NOT' was his reply. There was no attempt from him to engage in my inner turmoil. I returned home sad. The journey of exploration had started. That encounter took place in my first term around about November 1961. I now cannot recall the process that led me to make another journey on 17th March 1962 to meet David Sheppard, then Warden of the Mayflower. Sadly, it was not the best day to make the visit from his point of view as earlier that day his wife Grace had given birth to their daughter Jenny! Clearly, my tentative journey into seeking greater understanding contextual theology had begun.

I was fortunate to be assigned to join the Sunday visiting team from Oak Hill to the nearby Remand Home in Enfield. Here I felt reconnected to some aspects of life for young people on the edge here as well in Liverpool 8. I loved the opportunity to sit alongside these young lads and to hear their accounts of their journey into adolescent crime. I got more deeply involved and learnt that the Scripture Union had a worker, Douglas Palmer, who visited several remand homes and young offender

institutions placed around London. I made contact and journeyed across to meet him. He shared with me some of his approaches to these young people. I met empathy and a willingness to engage with the contextual issues that had often not given some of these lads much opportunity to escape the attraction of petty crime. This experience gave me a reflective window to see into this new world which was increasingly pulling at my heart strings of Christian compassion.

There were aspects of college life that I enjoyed, such as the opportunity to play squash, and to represent the College at both rugby and soccer. I met some fellow students whom I deeply admired, and discovered a greater understanding of them in the prayer partnership scheme that meant that we met another student for an hour's share and prayer time every week. I was surprised that I found I could cope with the academic demands of the course, though I never mastered the discipline of getting essays in on time!

During our 1962 summer vacation, Val became pregnant. It took us by surprise and when I returned to my studies in October Val remained at Clarendon and was now assigned as matron of the preparatory age girls who had just made the wrench of leaving their families to start their boarding school education. On the first Saturday night of my new term I was called to see the principal and was told that Val was in St Asaph Hospital and was expecting to miscarry. Earlier that summer, my brother in law Bill Parker had given me his old Armstrong Sidley Sapphire car! It was a beauty, but had clearly seen better days: it did however enable me to leave college and travel north overnight to be with her. It was a blow and a massive shock. Sadly, the aftercare wasn't great. I stayed home with Val for a little while. She returned to work at Clarendon, and I returned to Oak Hill to be greeted by two senior students who were family men. They explained that many first pregnancies often miscarried. There would be other opportunities to start a family. I was encouraged to brush it under the carpet and get on with life. Later on in my ministry I spent 25 years as a part-time chaplain of Liverpool Maternity Hospital and recognised too late that our pastoral care by

friends and health professionals was grossly misplaced. Perhaps I had learnt too early how to defend myself from emotional loss and was too prepared to let it go by without appropriate attention.

The greatest legacy of Oak Hill to me came from Maurice Wood's invitation to meet the Rev Richard Allen who had expressed an interest in meeting me to discuss a possible curacy at the newly formed Beacon Group Ministry that he was setting up in Everton, back home in Liverpool. Val and I agreed to meet Richard and his wife Molly during the summer vacation in 1963, whilst Val was still at Clarendon. We had car journeys with each of them, during which the deal was clinched. More of that next.

Questions for reflection

The tension between text and context began significant tensions and challenges in my own Christian values. Allowing this tension to work itself out proved to be a critical turning point in my own journey. This also marked the widening of my faith constructs.

Have you experienced such a tension as you reflect on your faith journey? If so, at what time(s) in your journey has this tension appeared? How did you deal with it, and what are the resultant benefits?



CHAPTER THREE

Curacy at Everton

It wasn't long after we had settled on going to Everton to start our curacy that we discovered Val was pregnant again. We decided that this time she would move to London; I gained permission to 'live out', and we took over an existing student let with a Mrs Dobson of nearby East Barnet. Val secured a secretarial position with Thorne Electrics in Enfield. Sadly, she suffered prolonged morning sickness, but as usual she managed as she braved the difficulties around her. She was glad to meet some of the other student wives and to attend the Monday Group for wives led by Mrs Wood. We had two other enjoyable experiences that summer. I was invited to act as a chaplain at a summer school camp for children from Tooting Comprehensive School brilliantly masterminded by the head of RE there, Laurie Green, to be held at the King William School on the Isle of Man. I shared the chaplaincy with Roger Crosthwaite, another ordinand from the London College of Divinity. Interestingly, there were two undergraduates from Oxford, already known to Laurie: Roger Morris, and one Wesley Carr who finally became Dean of Westminster. Besides leading the gospel evening meeting with Roger, I spent most days driving one of the minibuses to take parties of staff and students to different parts of the island for sight-seeing. It was very enriching.

The second enjoyable experience was that Val and I also joined a mission team to St James the Less in Bethnal Green, where Ted Roberts had been vicar for several years. He was a close collaborator with David Sheppard, and, with the full support of Trevor Huddleston, he had set up the first local ministry training programme.

The time was quickly approaching for us to make plans for our move to Everton. We paid a preliminary visit in the Christmas vac when we travelled to Liverpool to spend our Christmas with Val's parents in Bootle. We were taken to view a brand-new set of municipal flats already named John Kennedy Heights that were still being erected, though the top two were already occupied. Richard took us to meet Cissy and Bobby McClintock who lived in the middle block. It was hoped that we might be allocated a two bedroomed flat when the bottom block was due to be completed later in the year. Val's confinement date was now agreed to be in May 1964, and it became obvious that she would not be able to join me for the ordination planned for 24th May in St Peter's Formby. Val's mum kindly offered to come to Barnet to be with her.

In those days, ordinations normally took place at Trinity and Michaelmas. I duly turned up Thursday evening 21st May to join the six other ordinands to be made deacon - they were Bob Lewis to go to Kirkby, Alan Bailey to go to Formby, John Banner to go to Bootle, Bernard Harrison to go to Toxteth, David Rimmer to go to the Parish Church of Liverpool, and Spencer Waugh, a senior ordinand to go to Southport. I was billeted with Bob Lewis to stay in the Bishop's Lodge with Dr and Mrs Martin. Friday was given to a series of interviews with senior clergy and also a visit to Formby for a rehearsal. On Saturday, we joined the deacons who were to be priested at the Cathedral, and we had the Bishop's charge in the Bishop's Lodge Chapel, followed by quiet before the great day. The Bishop of Warrington, Laurie Brown, ordained us. I was very impressed at the very friendly way he engaged with my family who had gathered to support me. After a brief 'bun fight' at the church I had to make the journey back to be with Val. I arrived back at about 9pm via the A41 to Birmingham, then linking up with the M1 and M10.

I was exhausted, but so was Val's mum, who had had the ordeal of taking Val to Barnet Maternity for the birth of the new baby, and had to return home to the flat to await my return. I slept soundly after my own momentous day only to discover that Val had given birth to our baby daughter Amanda Joy Black at 1am. We were allowed to visit Val and Mandy in the afternoon. She had a mop of black hair and was a chubby 7lb baby. Val's mum was thrilled with her grandchild and returned to Liverpool to leave me in charge of mum and babe. I remember that on the way home, I insisted we stop at a baby shop and buy baby Mandy a dress from her proud dad. I completed my course of study and we travelled to Liverpool to start work. We had to live in Bootle with Val's parents until we were allocated No 16 John Kennedy Heights when the flats were completed in July, 1964. We were on the second floor and our neighbours were Mr and Mrs Turner. This block was immediately opposite St Timothy's Rokeby Street where I was to be based as curate. The flat was two bedroomed with a main living room, small kitchen, and bathroom. We collected our furniture that had remained stored in Clarendon School. Our bedroom doubled as study. It was compact. We were ready to start work in the Beacon Group Ministry that had been set up in 1963 with the arrival of Richard Allen as Vicar of the united benefice of St Ambrose and St Timothy. In addition, he was expected to form a link with St Polycarp's and Holy Trinity that were both staffed by priests in charge, Reg Bright and David Walker, as well as work more closely with Shrewsbury Boys' Club that had been sponsored by Shrewsbury Public School. It was a bold experiment, originally inspired by a school master at Shrewsbury School named Adrian Struve who felt strongly that the ministry of the Club Chaplain would be greatly enhanced if there was a more dynamic link between the club and the local churches.

Richard Allen rose to the challenge, inspired by the vision of The East Harlem Ministry in New York led by Bruce Kendrick, and written up in a new book 'Come out the wilderness'. This argued for a new mission perspective based on a more incarnational ministry which called for a church to be alongside local communities in their search for jus-

tice and liberation from the deeply embedded cycle of deprivation that prevailed in so many inner-city communities where poor housing, poor schools, high unemployment, and crime denied opportunities for so many who lived there. Richard felt strongly a team or group approach was essential to avoid clergy being isolated. The team principle also meant that it created the possibility for new ideas to emerge from this collaborative approach.

Soon after my arrival, Richard recruited Olivia Abbay, as a parish worker. At this point the team consisted of Richard Allen, Vicar, Roger Sainsbury who had come from Spitalfields to be the Warden and Chaplain of Shrewsbury House, and Eddie Neale, who had been ordained in Advent 1963. This group shared Richard's vision and were keen to get on with the job. Both Reg and David were bemused by the vision and preferred to hang on to the certainties of their entrenched conservative evangelical traditions. They reluctantly attended the team meetings, and sent representatives to the newly formed Beacon Group Council, which was to become the power house for the new initiatives that emerged between 1964 and 1967 whilst Richard remained leader.

Richard earned the nickname the 'gentle giant'. He was very tall but walked with an awkward gait, as a result of a skiing accident as a young man. He came from an upper middle-class home - his father was a medical consultant who worked from Harley Street. Richard was educated at Epsom College, read history at Cambridge, and served as an Army officer during WWII, being attached to the intelligence team serving Montgomery in the Middle East; rumour had it he had earned that posting after being in charge of the last unit to be inspected by the General Officer Commanding Visit to units on the Kent coast. The GOC had by this time become somewhat grumpy. On getting out of his car and being greeted by Richard, he promptly asked acerbically "What's that monument on that hill over there, Lieutenant?". Richard gave an accurate description and history of said monument and this informed reply led to his new posting. During the 1950s, he had served as a layman as a church history lecturer at Oak Hill College, and served

as an elected Liberal Councillor before he was ordained and served as Warden of St George's Crypt Leeds, where he met his wife Molly who worked as a medical doctor in the Public Health Service in Leeds. Together they worked to establish a more professional approach to the care of the men and women passing through the Crypt. I owe a great deal to Richard in the way he gave me space and time to develop my ministry in this new parish and community. He welcomed my ideas and innovations

At this point it is worth my reflecting on my experience of 'ministerial formation' both at theological college and within the Beacon Group Ministry that I was joining.

Oak Hill was committed to train evangelical students as 'ministers of the Word and Sacrament', but the pattern of liturgical life at Oak Hill was itself quite distinctive, and only nominally sacramental.

The day started with Morning Chapel at 7.15; there was no pressure to attend every day and non-attendance was never pursued with any student by a staff member.

The pattern of these morning services was: Monday, Wednesday and Friday simple Morning Prayer, and Tuesdays and Thursdays were devoted to Bible Exposition. Rev Alan Stibbs led on New Testament exposition, and Rev Derek Kidner led the Old Testament exposition. In the Evenings, Monday was Choir Practice, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday Evening Prayer, and Wednesday Evening Prayer with guest preacher, followed by supper at which the guest preacher might further comment.

As there was an extensive football and rugby fixtures programme within the London area, chapel attendance was excused to the respective teams when they were involved in an away fixture.

There were no services in the College chapel over the weekend, as every student was assigned to a Sunday placement in a local parish or other assignment. Students who lived with their wives in the community were excused weekend attendance, and so the weekends at College were very informal.

In addition to this communal pattern, students were expected to spend approximately 40 minutes on their own unsupervised “Quiet times” in their studies between morning chapel and breakfast. There was no pastoral or personal supervision, or pastoral spiritual care, of students from the staff.

The only other spiritual interaction was the ‘prayer partnership’ scheme where each student was assigned to meet other students in a timetabled hour each week with a different partner each time.

The Beacon Team met for a weekly Team Meeting during which Richard Allen the Team Leader would lead a bible study on a passage of Scripture followed by a time of prayer where members were able to offer spontaneous prayer. This was followed by a formal team meeting to discuss the work of the Team within the churches and parish and at which individual members were assigned to their weekend tasks in the team churches and to other requests for ministerial assistance in local parishes where there were inter-regna.

In the main, each of the four churches in the Team would have daily morning and evening prayer with perhaps 2 Holy Communion services on various mornings and one in the evening as a regular pattern.

There was a memorable Team prayer time which took place at Richard Allen’s attended by team members plus Roger Sainsbury’s dog ‘Chopper’, a lively Beagle who followed Roger everywhere - including staff prayers – and was well known throughout Everton. Richard always insisted on kneeling for prayers, which in his case meant he would kneel into a small arm chair. This meant his behind quarters were the ‘highest’ part of his body on display. Once, after we had all sat down to pray, Richard suddenly roared “Chopper, get off!”. Chopper had managed to jump up and lodge himself on Richard’s behind. Richard wasn’t amused, but Eddie and I were doubled up in subdued laughter! Such happy memories contribute to the rich tapestry of life.

It was interesting to observe how Roger Sainsbury on being appointed as Warden of Shrewsbury House radically altered the liturgical life there. This was a traditional chapel where previous wardens had observed a typical public-school pattern of chapel services where the warden would robe and follow a formal liturgical pattern. Roger turned this ‘upside down’ by simply organising an informal Sunday Evening Evangelistic Service and holding small Bible study groups with interested club members. Joe Hunt who was a regular worshipper at St Timothy’s and also a Shrewsbury House member was quite critical of these changes. Roger also found the culture of the Shrewsbury ‘Old Boys’ group difficult. They had a very active football team group and the ‘Old Boys’ had been used to holding regular Old Boy Nights at the Club. These were stopped and the Old Boys’ Football Team carried on its training and fixtures away from the Club.

Again, with the benefit of hindsight, it is quite clear that the ethos and vision of the new Beacon Group was intent on establishing its own vision of evangelism and mission deeply influenced by Bruce Kendrick’s ‘Come out the wilderness’ approach of East Harlem, where there was little faith in traditional styles of Christian presence and a much higher priority was placed on contextual and incarnational ministry where community involvement was given precedence.

Richard Allen set the pattern to this approach himself. His primary tasks centred around two projects: The Everton Telegraph and the Beacon Housing Association.

He personally subsidised the production of a free fortnightly tabloid paper. He appointed an editor and secured the printing by a printer in Bala. 1000 copies were produced each fortnight and the team members were committed to delivering these to every household - but only in the St Timothy’s and St Ambrose parishes.

Richard himself edited Dave's Diary within the paper in which he ably discussed all manner of human and Christian issues. It became a very important communication tool from The Beacon Team to its local community.

His vision was to speak to the community with a new voice, devoid of church 'trappings' to create an implicit tool of pre-evangelism.

Richard was also convinced of the need to create a resident indigenous community as a foundation for authentic incarnational ministry. He was well ahead in this thinking. This small Beacon Housing Association aimed to build at least 8-10 houses to house a small Christian community upon which a new style of Christian presence would be established. He succeeded in enlisting a local bank manager and a solicitor to become trustees. Val my wife was appointed minutes secretary.

I was encouraged to initiate new projects that were 'community' – or rather 'kingdom' focused rather than 'church' focused.

In my case I focused on four initial projects: the Young Marrieds Club, The Whipper Snappers, Chaplaincy to the local ATC Squadron, and Developing the Pathfinder Movement, which sought to develop links with community development initiatives emerging from the local Authority.

I was offered no training by Richard. He never asked to see sermons. He simply encouraged me to develop my ministry and its contacts without comment or criticism. Even on the day I was priested I was assigned to preside at my first Eucharist without any training or preparation. By 1966, Michael Saward had joined the Team, in another innovative appointment: half time Team member with responsibility for half-time care of Holy Trinity St Anne Street, and half time first Christian Aid Organiser for Merseyside. I was asked to preside at a Team Eucharist, and Michael simply commented that I had a sincere tone in my voice.

Michael was invited to move into 67 Shaw Street, the Vicarage of Holy Trinity St Anne Street. He succeeded the Rev David Walker who was a fiery Ulster Protestant. David was a long serving Church Army

Captain. The Bishop of Liverpool, Dr Clifford Martin ordained David without any formal ordination training. David was ultra conservative and struggled to embrace the vision of the new Beacon Group Ministry. He subsequently moved to be Vicar of St Brides Liverpool until his retirement.

David and his wife and daughter managed to survive life in the very large and dilapidated 67 Shaw Street. Michael inspected the property and submitted a schedule of repair and improvement, which cost over £2000 - a fortune in those days. Michael loved gadgets, and had installed a hands-free telephone system in his first-floor study. He was ambitious, and his pushy cleverness irked me when compared to Richard Allen's comparative gentleness and natural intelligence and ability.

Michael and Jackie were struggling to have more children, and without any sense of embarrassment he was able to declare in the Team Meeting with three female team members in attendance that his GP had prescribed a course of simple treatment which entailed Michael submerging his scrotum in a bowl of ice-cold water each morning! Such was his candour ...

Michael only lasted two years. During his time at Holy Trinity, he tried to resurrect its strong evangelical legacy. It was built in circa 1775 as an Evangelical Lecture Hall with its own appointed Lecturer and was only incorporated as a Parish Church in 1880 when the new Diocese of Liverpool was carved out of the older Chester Diocese.

Michael persuaded John Stott of All Souls London to come and lecture. It attracted a good crowd of Liverpool evangelicals. During his time, he also put a great deal of energy into building up the Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship.

It is fascinating to compare my personal devotional life that emerged from Oak Hill with my time in the Beacon Group. Life in the cramped but happy home in Kennedy Heights meant that I never developed a regular pattern of daily devotions, which I have now discovered for the first time in my retirement years. It contrasts strongly to younger clergy

that have joined groups that I set up later – they seem quite committed to maintain saying the Daily Office, and have done so since their respective ordinations.

It is worth commenting on some features of church life before Synodical Government was introduced into the C of E: there was an annual Diocesan Conference to which all clergy and I think Church wardens were invited. One I remember was held in the vast assembly hall of Byron Street Technical College. There must have been about 500 seated in front of the stage. The bishops and two archdeacons were in formal attire: frock coats and gaited leggings! The chairman was Alderman Clifford - who had a distinctive stutter - seated alongside the Diocesan Registrar, Gamon Arden suitable be-wigged with academic gown. I had several opportunities to meet Gamon Arden in his office at Church House. He had the amazing capacity to smoke while he talked! The ash would gather at the end of his cigarette until it eventually fell off. This brief memoir reveals the end of Victorian Anglicanism.

Similarly, it is worth commenting on Post Ordination Training (POT) in the 1960s: in the first year, I was assigned to a study group of 4 curates – John Banner, a strong evangelical attached to St Leonard's Bootle; Dr David Hope, a committed Anglo-Catholic (who later became Archbishop of York) attached to St. John's Tuebrook where Father Frank Samson was Vicar; sadly, I can't remember the fourth curate in the study group. We were assigned to supervision by Canon Hopkinson who shared a residential canonry at the Cathedral with the post of Diocesan Director of Education. We were asked to read and share two tomes: Barth's Commentary on Romans, and Neibuhr's Moral Man and Immoral Society. Sadly, I didn't take the reading seriously and never submitted the required essay at the end of the first year. I was not censured for not submitting my POT essay. I enjoyed the meetings, but the gulf between Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic perspectives remained firmly in place after the first year.

Canon Basil Naylor at the Cathedral shared the role of Cathedral Treasurer and Diocesan Officer for In-Service Clergy Training, including POT. He was able to convene several residential events for the curates which he led with flair and engendered a good culture of support; he also managed to maintain an 'open door' policy to his room at the Cathedral, which I found very helpful so much so that this resource and relationship became quite important for me.

In the second year of POT, I chose to take the option of enrolling with CELT (Council for Evangelism and Lay Training) which was run by the Diocesan Missioner, Canon John Hunter, with whom I developed a close working relationship. CELT offered curates the chance to enrol in courses offered by National Training run from Church House in London which majored on understanding group dynamics. This started off with attending a five-day residential at which participants joined a "T" group. You were assigned to a small group with two leaders. There was no set agenda or input; the task was for participants to observe the dynamics of the group interaction in order to discern the interplay between task and process within the life of the group. The unusual process produced some interesting reactions: one person came, couldn't cope with the long silences that often ensued and so went home after only one day; another sat through the entire week and never said a word! A female worker fell in love with a young Benedictine priest who wanted to bed her during the week, but without success. Again, it takes all types to keep the big world turning! There were two follow up sessions: one where the group dynamics were experienced in midsize (15 plus), which I was able to attend, and the final one where the dynamics were that of a large group (25plus), which I was unable to attend. Some people who enjoyed these sessions went on to link up with the Grubb Institute and / or the Tavistock organisation.

CELt offered curates to opt into social analysis and audit which at that time was deeply influenced by the Chicago Institute. The task here was to undertake an audit of the parish and analyse types of housing, community resources, schools, doctors, shopping etc.. I loved this and

I have benefitted from this approach throughout my ministry, significantly in my two following incumbencies and in the Evangelical Urban Training Project (EUTP) and Liverpool Diocesan Group for Urban Ministry and Leadership (GUML) which I was later appointed to lead. As part of this, staff from the University's Continuing Education Department were deployed as lecturers and they were able to link the students with Local Authority Community Development officers. I soon met Joe Daniel, the Everton Officer, and worked with him quite closely both as curate in the Beacon Group and as Vicar at St. George's later

There were two helpful outcomes of this relationship: having close links with Shrewsbury House in the Beacon Group enabled Joe and me to set up a monthly lunch club for Professional Workers, and the relationships built here opened up new networks in the surrounding community.

There was historic hostility between Roman Catholic and Protestant communities, especially in the area around Shrewsbury House where the Orange Lodge's huge following in the community prevented any meaningful relationships being developed between the Anglican Churches and the Roman Catholic Churches in Everton. Shrewsbury House had always attracted young Roman Catholics to join in the sporting and leisure activities provided by the Club, but this never managed to reduce the hostility of parents and their community liaisons.

The Professional Workers' Group broke significant new ground. Although no RC priests joined the group, there were several nuns linked to local parishes who bravely crossed the frontiers to create new thresholds. I have a vivid memory of meeting a young and attractive nun Sister Mary MacAleese coming on her 'sit up and beg' bicycle wearing a smart navy-blue suit with light blue nun's veil over her head. She was attached to the historically RC Power house Church of St Anthony, Scotland Road that was part of the Vauxhall Hall Community Network.

That early connection with Sister Mary blossomed as she opened the door to my meeting much later the formidable Father Austin Smith, a member of the Passionate Religious Order, who became a legend in Liverpool from the mid 1970s. This working relationship became a mustard seed in the working out of God's Kingdom in Liverpool in later years.

Joe Daniel played a pivotal role later in the development of the significant West Everton Community Council; this proved to be significant in later years in revitalising the community with key people serving on it such as successive Vicars of St. Peter's Everton (into which Shrewsbury House was integrated in the early 1970s). People like Julian Charley, Henry Corbett, alongside Club Leader John Hutchinson together with Sir Mark and Lady Hedley who as a young barrister set up home in Everton and together contributed so much to the regeneration of the community around the new St. Peter's Everton. This included some magnificent ecumenical cooperation with outcomes such as the establishment of Faith Primary School, of Hope University Complex at St Francis Xavier (SFX) and not least the creation of Everton Park.

Sadly, my claim for any part I played in the establishment of Everton Park lies heavily dependent on my own account - but read on! The Professional Workers' Group identified the need for Everton to have more open space. My version of events is as follows. Together with Eddie Cartwright, a key leader in Shrewsbury House and an accomplished community activist, and Joe Daniel I met with Lord Sefton - Liverpool's Ernest Bevin and Labour Leader of the City Council - we remonstrated about the lack of open space. As we persisted, we obviously succeeded in getting under his radar, and out of frustration he barked out to his accompanying official "Give them their f*cking park!" In reality, it took John Hutchinson and his community colleagues many long hours and years to achieve this dream, and necessitated the demolition of established multi-storey blocks of flats (including The Braddocks Blocks,

Cresswell Mount, St. George's Heights, and Corinth Towers) much later in the 1990s before the land was released to allow the development of Everton Park.

The benefit of hindsight gives me a fascinating understanding - and encouragement - about how waiting for things to happen slowly seems to be an important aspect of how God's Kingdom activity takes place, especially in inner city communities. Consider the fascinating comparison between the human / temporal timescales and the cosmic: even hundreds of years of temporal time are whisked away as a mere glimpse in cosmic time. We humans need a lot of learning to take place as we engage in learning how God's Kingdom unfolds, or rolls out its own 'Kingdom' timescale among us.

One final observation on the development of the Everton Telegraph. Within a year, Richard Allen handed the running of the paper to Eddie Neal as Editor and me as Business Manager. I had to raise £2K pa from advertising copy. This meant crossing some interesting thresholds, but I was thrilled that we secured contracts from local businesses which meant me ringing them up for copy for their space, e.g. 'This week's best buy is sausages @ £x, bread @ £x' etc.. It was huge fun for me getting access to marketing people; we managed, and the paper survived.

In 1965, when Liverpool reached the F.A. Cup Final to play Leeds United, Eddie wrote a mainline article offering to run a raffle for two tickets that would be donated by Liverpool FC. He sent a copy of the paper to Liverpool FC who contacted him, saying FA rules wouldn't permit such a raffle. So, the raffle didn't take place. But, Bill Shankly offered to meet us in the famous Anfield Boot Room, an offer we eagerly accepted. He showed interest in the work we were doing and then asked "Would one of you be able to buy a ticket for the game?" Eddie had no choice but to allow me as a lifelong Kopite to accept (to non-football fans the Anfield Football Ground has a famous stand called The Kop, where I used to stand when I watched Liverpool FC). True to his word, I was allowed to buy a £6 stand ticket. I subsequently took the overnight

train from Liverpool which arrived at Euston about 6am, and met lots of the supporters who were already in London before I made my way to the hallowed Wembley to watch Liverpool's historic first Cup Final win.

Following ordination, I was placed primarily at St Timothy's Church with a small congregation of about 30 plus, the core of which had decamped to St Timothy's in the 1940s after the parish church of St Augustine in Shaw Street had been destroyed by enemy action in the blitz.

The St Timothy's area was quite compact. Apart from several small streets of 19th Century terraced housing which had escaped slum clearance, it consisted of about 60 new council houses, plus 3 multi-storey blocks- The Kennedy Heights - with 3 further multi-story blocks still being built in 1964.

The Three Kennedy Height blocks consisted of a mixture of 4 flats per floor of one or two bedroomed units; most of the residents were middle aged couples or pensioners living on their own. The new blocks of Crosbie, Haigh and Canterbury were quite different: they were 3 bedroomed maisonettes of mainly young families with up to 10 flats per landing. Most of the parents had been living in rooms in their parents' houses. The new flats were heated by underfloor electric heating with which the new occupants were quite unfamiliar. Some families accrued very high electric bills that became unsustainable, as a result of which many had electric supplies cut off. This accelerated severe condensation problems. At one point later into my curacy I established that there were 26 infants under 8 on the sixth floor. The balconies had metal frames made from angle iron, leaving a 9-inch gap between the inner frame and the top bar. This construction allowed small children a foothold on the angle iron frame and bar which would have allowed a child to drop! It was a nightmare situation. Tragically, within 5 years the three blocks - which had become labelled 'The Piggeries' - were demolished.

In this small Parish, there were three primary schools - one County, Salisbury Street, and two Roman Catholic - and its pastoral patch was 90% Roman Catholic with two strong, well established RC par-

ishes – SFX (St Francis Xavier) run by Jesuits, and The Friary run by Franciscans. There was no ecumenical contact between our Team and the RC clergy. In direct contrast, St Ambrose (where Eddie Neale was assigned to), a more settled community also with council houses and several well-established tower blocks, was populated by a 90% Protestant community. There was a significant commitment to the Orange Lodge Movement in the St Ambrose area. A previous incumbent had even been a supporter of the Lodge.

A simple profile of the Church of England in Everton in 1964 reveals a familiar pattern -prayer book services with ancient and modern hymns, dominated by the clergy who read the service including the lessons, chose the hymns, selected the prayers, and who often preached from pulpits six foot above comprehension! It was a challenging encounter. I felt the dilemma acutely. I've reflected that it was like punching a very soft spongy punchbag that absorbed all it was given without any meaningful engagement. My frustration was that College hadn't prepared me for this, even though I had loved the challenge of having learnt how to take a piece of scripture and reduce it to "Daily Mirror" language. This technique still didn't resonate. I had been schooled in the world of individuated ethics and morals, but this didn't scratch where my new Christian community itched. A steep learning curve lay ahead.

With the benefit of hindsight, I am able to reflect many years later on the challenge that I faced in coming to terms with this new culture/community. Although it was less than 5 miles from Bootle, the two communities were remarkably different. 'My' Bootle was essentially artisan where there was growth in owner occupation - fathers were tradesmen or clerical workers - and where 50% of the children in my primary school passed scholarships to the Grammar schools, and a significant number went on later to university education and pursued professional careers. Individual aspiration was at the core of this artisan community. The Everton community was quite different. Following the slum clearance of the terraced housing, the new community were 100% council tenants. Most parents were in local factories, on the docks or in

warehousing, all of which affirmed the strong tribal or group culture. I pondered much later that the transition required in my thinking was not unlike experiencing a primal scream that demanded intellectual rebirth.

St Timothy's congregation numbered about 40, and at the heart of this congregation were the Duckitt family: Richy was married to Phyllis, and Ruby was Richy's single sister. Richy and Ruby's parents had lived in Aubery Street where they had a dairy, probably with a couple of cows in a stable. There were two boys: Arthur who trained as an accountant, and Richy who trained as a joiner. Ruby remained at home at the end of her primary education to act as carer and housekeeper, primarily to her mother. Arthur wasn't involved in the church, whereas the church was the total fulltime pre-occupation of Richy, Phyllis and Ruby. When I arrived, there was a small Victorian gothic style church, with a hall and house accommodation. It wasn't in the best of condition but to his credit Richy handled every aspect of fabric maintenance, and Phyllis led the fundraising activities. These centred around Christmas and summer bazaars, and a weekly house to house collection around the newly created council housing estate consisting of three ten-storey blocks, and approximately 100 or so 3 and 4 bed council houses. Ruby ran the girls' club and Sunday School.

The core of the Sunday School was made up of just 2 or 3 families: the Bridsons and The Corkes provided at least five children from their 2 families. Initially, I didn't hit it off with Ruby, who once in her total frustration with me blurted out "Mr Black, you should have been a Methodist" because I suspect I was a working-class lad from nearby Bootle, whereas all my male colleagues were public school and Cambridge educated. In addition, Olivia Abbay the parish worker had worked at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and her father was a RN Commander; she populated her 'corpy' flat with antique furniture and Persian rugs, and most of her clothes came from Harrods. Despite this, she did not have any arrogant swagger. On the contrary, to her immense credit, she brought a special level of pastoral care to this inner-city community. When she arrived and we were introduced, I immediately announced

“the scousers here will almost certainly call you ‘Olly’!”: they did, and it stuck. Likewise, Edward Neale, was called Eddie, and Roger Sainsbury was nicknamed Chopper, mainly because when he arrived at Shrewsbury House - nicknamed ‘The Shewsy’ - he kicked so many out for bad language and poor behaviour. Roger also gave his nickname to his dog – part of his adopted Scouse sense of humour! I never discovered my nickname!

In my first year, I became the visiting preacher to the several local churches having inter-regna, and where the non-liturgical services of morning and evening prayer dominated the worshipping life of the predominantly low church evangelical churches in the greater Everton area. I preached 78 sermons in my first year. I started off with the topic of David and Goliath at Holy Trinity St Anne Street, with a minute congregation of about 15; the existential difference was that I was the David without a sling to defeat the Goliath of the Church of England battling with the dissonance of its ability to engage with inner-city life and its people.

After an over-boisterous encounter between Bootle Grammar School and Public School touch rugby in the hall, I was floored by Eddie and ripped my cartilage. I was admitted to the Northern Hospital and off for about two months. Upon my discharge, there was a reappraisal of our respective areas of responsibility: Eddie’s ability with the youth was recognised, and I was asked to focus on the under 11’s at St Tim’s. I accepted this without regret. Clarendon School had very kindly sent a gift of £500 in a very generous endorsement of Val’s work at the School, which enabled the parish to buy a blue Bedford minibus. This became a massive resource for my work with the primary school boys at St Tim’s where Derek Bridson and Stephen Corke became key members. I settled on ‘St Tim’s Whipper Snappers’ as the name for this new group. We used to meet at 4pm on Mondays after school, and had two main activities centred on Hall Road, Crosby, (where incidentally Val and I had enjoyed many hours of happy beach combing courting) and the canal at Melling. At the former, we searched for wood and lit

fires, and at the latter we parked alongside the canal, where, armed with jam jars and fishing nets, the group fished for tiddlers in the canal. It was carefree and fun for all concerned, apart from one day: as I wandered up and down the canal, I found that one John Bridson had fallen into the canal, and managed to hang on without any fuss, until ‘Sir’ came; he beamed his toothless smile, and uttered “I’ve fallen in, Sir”. I pulled him out and assembled the group to return home. Happy days! I shudder to think how I would have coped with the safeguarding regime of today! It would not have been allowed to happen - but in fact more was to happen! Paul Southern, a bright young 16-year-old from Liverpool Collegiate, a committed member of St Tim’s youth group, and a member with his dad of the small robed choir at St Tim’s, as well as being a Boys Brigade member at Holy Trinity Walton Breck, offered to help with a summer camp at Barnston Dale Camp on the Wirral. We ventured out, one curate with 6th form assistant, and about 15 whipper snappers. We had a ball - we slept in a nissan type hut, and arranged daily excursions to different locations on the Wirral. Everyone was expected to fulfil after-meal washing up duties. It was a nightmare! As soon as we located one whippersnapper at sinkside we went in search of other reluctant volunteers. It was a hopeless pursuit! Eventually, Paul and I gave in, and did the washing up ourselves. The highlight of the week was the visit to the open-air swimming pool at West Kirby that had a slide. I couldn’t resist the challenge to have a go! So I did - but without realising that normally the slide would have had the assistance of a spray of water to ease the descent. I slid down without water and without splinter, only to be greeted by cries of pain from Eugene, the only black boy in otherwise white Everton who raised his foot, where a crab was hanging on to his big toe! This excursion was a learning time. You had to get alongside inner-city people, and enjoy their fun and pleasure in order to earn the right to talk about God and his redemptive claim on their lives. It was my first encounter with the challenges of incarnational mission – where being fully present with people is more important than trying to convert them. It wasn’t an easy lesson to learn. The whipper snappers had

a ball - they didn't want to come home. Paul and I were exhausted. But, it had been a lovely experience for me. I wasn't ready to really appraise the benefits of this experience, but it was a start to the learning curve that was to follow.

Our next venture with the whipper snappers was to make use of the facilities of The Cottage and Barn at Sarnau in West Wales, which was owned by an Old Salopian who gifted the use of it to Shrewsbury House. It gave the chance to involve Bob and Thelma Harrington with whom we had formed a growing friendship. They had both belonged to St Mary Kirkdale, where Bob was a leader in the youth group and Thelma a Brownie leader. Bob's father and mother were longstanding members at St Timothy's, Bob's sister Ellen was a leader with the Girls Club at St Tims and Sid her husband was a keen member of the small robed choir at St Tim's (it was Paul their elder son who had come with me to Barnston Dale, already mentioned).

Bob had produced a Christmas Nativity 'mini playlet' involving the young people of St Tim's, and demonstrated his ability not only to write the script, but also to back it with music recorded on a tape recorder and played to back the action in the Nativity playlet. I asked him to write and record a daily story 'The Castle of Adventure' for use with the young people while at Sarnau. During the week, we set up Spot the Officer Game for the young people to explore and 'reveal' the officers in fancy dress. Bob as Father Brown was not spotted such was his natural gift. Although the rural setting offered access to lovely West Wales beaches, some of the 'city kids' found it difficult without a fairground! A little later The Bishop of Liverpool asked Bob and the young Pathfinders at St Tim's to create a soundtrack for the CPAS filmstrip Jonah, which he wanted to use at a Diocesan Conference at Swanwick.

I must now give some time to unravel the mystery of Ruby Duckitt. It took several levels before the penny dropped. Initially she seemed to be a grumpy spinster set in her ways, a bulwark against change and innovation - until I got under her radar: the first step was to join her

summer camp at Filey on the Yorkshire coast, open to the girls' club members and their siblings. I can't remember how I got involved. It was about 1967. I offered to attend the camp, and had asked if I could help. She referred me to Malcolm and his sister Pamela. Their mum had left them with their dad, who had a low paid factory job and couldn't afford to pay for them to go to the camp. I offered to pay. I received a letter of thanks from Malcolm with a little plastic decorative plate as a gift of thanks. When I did a bit more digging about Ruby's background, it was a real revelation: her parents had died when she was in her mid-thirties, when Richy and Phyllis occupied the parental home. Ruby had to relocate to private rented accommodation, and find employment for the first time. The options were limited. She chose to be a dinner lady at the local school - a poorly paid job offering pay only during the 40-week term, with half pay for holidays. It was a pittance. She had to live near the 'knuckle' and yet she ran two girls' clubs at St Tim's, the Sunday School and the summer camp. Her commitment and constancy provided a solid, if rather staid, reference point for many girls in that rapidly changing community. Her story and example have been rewritten in many inner-city congregations, where Sunday School teachers and Brownie and Girl Guide, Cub, Scout and Boys' Brigade leaders have indelibly impacted on the myriads of children and young people in the vast inner-city communities throughout Merseyside. As part of her Christian stewardship, she saved from her meagre income to subsidise poor children to attend the summer camp. I began to realise that I needed to wear new glasses to recognise this new or different perspective on inner city 'grace', not fashioned by affirming a creed of intellectual assent, but by acting out practical kindness. Oh for ears to hear and eyes to see what the incarnate Lord is doing 'under our noses', and to learn how to welcome angels among us!

Ruby's legacy extended beyond her Girls' Club. There were about 6 'old club girls' in the congregation at St Tim's when Val and I arrived. They were our age. As yet without children, Val and I decided to target them. We invited them and their husbands to a fun night in our little

flat. About 12 came. It was an instant success: we formed 'the Young Marrieds' and agreed to a set up a programme of monthly nights for fun and friendship. We formed friendships then that have survived right through today with Bobby and Thelma Harrington, and with Joe Hunt and his sister-in-law Betty, despite Joe losing his first wife Pauline, and Betty being laid low with aggressive diabetes. The mind still boggles today when I think that when we organised our first residential weekend away at St Asaph in North Wales, we were able to settle for an all-inclusive full board tariff of £3.50 for adults and £2 for each of the children for the whole weekend!

Bob became a special friend - especially as some of the whipper snappers stayed with us and joined the youth group at St Tim's - and again much later in 1967 after we had two house moves when we settled in 67 Shaw Street, when Michael Saward moved for his first incumbency at Ealing. The house was massive - a terraced town house of four floors, including a substantial attic, and a very large cellar, with its own front entrance via the steps from the street. Clearly, in earlier years these had been the servants' quarters. It is worth noting how many of Liverpool's inner-city parishes retained a distinguished row or street formerly occupied by the doctors and dentists and other professionals, and behind these streets were densely populated back to back streets of terraced houses or courts where the working-class people were crammed into. The familiar pattern of housing development in inner-city Liverpool revealed that these streets for the professionals had been established alongside the roads created to access Liverpool; they were then 'back-filled' with enormous tightly packed back-to-back terraced housing. More of this later.

Our new home at 67 Shaw Street with all its space gave Val and me new opportunities to extend our mission work in the parish, but this was also to expose Val to stress and serious illness. The cellar provided us with an excellent venue for our youth club work, involving only about 15 youngsters, who were moving up from the whipper snappers, or Ruby's girls' club. We soon furnished it with cheap secondhand fur-

niture, and cleared the chimney so that we could have a coal fire in the front room, whilst the large rear room was painted and became the games room.

It is worth taking stock of how my work as curate was shaping up, and my understanding of the challenges of inner-city ministry were being addressed. Although the Diocese laid on some post ordination training, it only lasted two years. More importantly, the Evangelical Anglican constituency was gaining strength, and seeking to increase its influence nationally. For curates under 40, a national network called The Eclectics was formed, and access to the resources and energy of this group was especially significant for Eddie Neale and me with our team. Eclectics had been formed to network and resource the many young evangelicals working in non - evangelical parishes and in the inner city. It's worth noting that it was at the Eclectics Conference, circa 1966, held at Swanwick and attended by approx 200 that some strategic decisions were made of national importance concerning the Evangelical commitment to maintain their place in the diverse Anglican Community in England.

The publication of Bishop John Robinson's 'Honest to God' had rocked and disturbed hard-line conservative Evangelicals who questioned whether they could remain within the Church of England. There was a heated debate in which two senior Evangelicals, the much loved George Duncan - Vicar of Cockfosters, London and a main speaker at the Keswick Convention - and Herbert Carson of the Round Church in Cambridge pleaded that it was time to leave, which they did: Duncan to Troon in the Church of Scotland and Carson to the security of the Church of Ireland. John Stott's leadership was crucial. He persuaded emerging younger Evangelical clergy, including David Sheppard, Michael Baughen, Michael Saward, and Timothy Dudley Smith - all apart from Michael to be appointed as Anglican bishops later - to stay and fight. As a result of this event, the first National Evangelical Anglican Conference (NEAC) was later planned and took place in 1967. This marked a significant point for both the integration and the growing influence of Evangelical leadership in the Church of England, culminating

in the appointment of George Carey as Archbishop of Canterbury many years later. At another late-night session for clergy working in the inner-city and outer-city estates, David Sheppard appealed for a communication tool between so many younger clergy struggling to understand the link between text and context (as I was) to unravel the complexities of understanding and communicating within the vast inner-city and outer-city estates that many were working in. From this, 'The Industrial Areas Correspondence' was launched, to which my colleague Eddie O'Neil was appointed as Editor. This network became much later on the starting point for my work as the founding Project Officer of the Evangelical Urban Training Project in 1974.

Besides the regular pattern of large meetings with inspirational speakers at Eclectics, we were invited to join study groups, and one became enormously important to me. Eddie was a bright and enthusiastic colleague and he offered to share with the group new insights on working class culture gained from reading a book by sociologist Josephine Klein that offered her analysis of working-class culture. It became a treasure trove for us as we were seeking keys to unlock new understandings of the communities in which we were working. Even I, from the artisan, grammar school environment of Bootle that had been so formative in my own involvement with church and the Christian faith, struggled to find meaningful points of resonance between the variety of cultural contexts. How much more of a struggle this clearly was for the hundreds of bright, university-educated former public-school boys having to work as committed evangelicals in the non-evangelical parishes of urban Britain.

To summarise, Klein described some dominant features of working class culture: essentially immobile (remaining located in their communities of birth and work), they had developed a sophisticated language style (later to be identified with the restrictive speech code in the writing of Bernstein), they had strong and defined roles for the men and women, and perhaps the most illuminating feature for us in our work in the parish was the significance of the 'splash philosophy' linked to the

predominantly corporate or group identity. Throughout Britain, working class tribal communities had developed over the passage of time key moments in their local experience when they gathered over a few days to celebrate and to 'splash out' from the monotony of the heavy restrictions of everyday life where many worked long hours in the local factories, mines, or ports which demanded such rigorous routines, e.g. the Durham Miners' Gala, the Goose Fair in Nottingham, and in protestant Everton the Orange Lodge parades in July, matched by the St Patrick Day celebrations or Corpus Christi in the Catholic communities. Such celebrations were crucially important moments of 'splash' or 'break out' in urban communities all over Britain.

Eddie and I shared the significance of these new insights with the Team. There were some almost immediate strategic decisions made that affected our ministry in Everton. We had to develop a new approach that linked 'fun and faith' and played to the group senses in our communities. So many of the inner-city congregations were made up of strong individuals or families who were happy to stand out against the group or gang culture to take their place and to stamp their mark on their local congregation. In fact, the very act of joining a local congregation, for whatever reason, often involved an unwritten initiation process whereby children, men and women had to make changes to their normal living styles if they were to be accepted and welcomed into these congregations e.g. the women buying and wearing hats, and the men acquiring a new jacket or suit for church attendance. In this process, these individuals were like the Samaritans of old - they were neither Gentiles any longer, nor could they ever become proper Jews. They stood isolated in the middle.

The Team agreed to a 'double barrel' approach to implement the new learning that we had gained: we planned to have a monthly Family Service where the rigours of prayer book morning prayer and ancient and modern hymns were laid aside in a simple structure of one bible reading, with modern hymns and tunes and an illustrated sermon, or a short drama, or dramatised bible readings. The aim was to complete the

service in 45 minutes and to follow always with refreshments. Alongside this, we also planned a monthly Family Club with a carefully arranged social programme. On one occasion when our programme was well underway and supported by both St Tim's and St Ambrose, I booked 150 seats to see Ken Dodd in Blackpool, with time either to eat or visit the fairground there before the show. I vividly remember collecting the £3 inclusive cost of coach and theatre. I had to arrange to go from coach to coach during the trip. It was a steep learning curve on several issues including the importance of working within the working class culture which involved recognising their leaders; in our case, two women, Lotty and May, were able to recruit 50 members each of their respective families to join in, which meant in the case of the Blackpool trip that they alone had recruited 2/3rds of the gang that went. Sadly, this 'corporate' or 'gang' culture contrasted with the individualistic culture that underpinned most inner-city congregations. Again, more of this later.

There were some difficult times during my curacy. The first was the premature leaving of Richard Allen, who became clinically depressed. Naturally, this became of great concern to his doctor wife who urged him to see a counsellor, which he resolutely refused to do. This led to them separating after two short-term attempts to relocate, first in a radical youth-based project in London, and then a return to St George's Leeds. A short time later, he was killed in a motor accident on the M1. I had the privilege of preaching at his funeral service in Leeds. I owed a great deal to his open handed and open-hearted leadership where I was given space to innovate and develop in my own journey of coming to terms with the complexities of urban ministry and embracing the special demands which being in the Church of England made upon young ministers at that time.

Val had our second daughter Penny in December 1965, which placed great pressure on our cramped living conditions in Kennedy Heights. By this time, I was fully involved in the community around us. Our location of being right on top of the church meant we were bombarded with frequent calls at the door: on one occasion there were

40 calls at the door in one day! The pressure on Val with two small children and me being out and about, up to my neck in work began to tell. We were encouraged to share a vacant vicarage in Erskine Street with Eddie and his new wife Judith. We were assigned the middle and top floors. There was more space, but we were now a long walk away from the church and the nursery in Prince Edwin Street which Mandy had started to attend.

The 'fun and faith mission' approach to our work continued. I suggested that the next logical step, after the earlier success of the young married couples' weekend away, was to organise a holiday by the sea. We settled on Scarborough. Richard, Eddie and I decided to go. I did all the practical organisation. We were due to depart in July, but Val became ill. Our local GP Bill Maclean called and decided to arrange a home visit from a nearby consultant who diagnosed jaundice. I had to stay at home - but the holiday venture was a great success, and indicated that we were beginning to build a pastoral bridge between our churches and the communities around them. Sometime later (in 1967) Michael and Jackie Saward moved to London, and we had a further house move to 67 Shaw Street. Again, with the benefit of hindsight Val's willingness to negotiate 3 house moves, with two small children all within two years put her under stress. She began to experience the first stages of depression, not helped by the enormity of our new house.

It was fortunate that on our return to Liverpool we had been able to reconnect with our respective family networks in Bootle, where Val's parents Eric and Edna Winter gave us magnificent and frequent support. They were a real 'godsend' to us and the children - baby sitting, car borrowing, holiday sharing and much more. On my side of the family, we had always used Christmas to have a family get together, which meant that my sister Maisie, with husband Bill and sons Andrew and Malcolm would travel North from London. Our new house with its spacious rooms provided a magnificent resource for our family party - where together with sister Min and her GP husband John and their 3 children - Phillip, Angela and Simon, brother Ron with wife Margaret and their

threeboys - David Ian and Neil, together with sister Joyce with husband Johnny - not to mention Nanny Black - we gathered on Boxing Day. Andrew, a tall 19-year-old, played Father Christmas, and as he knocked on the front door and was allowed in, one of the young nephews shouted out excitedly "Daddy...daddy it's a real Father Christmas". It is a lovely memory of a great family occasion. Over that same weekend in 1967 Maisie gauged that Val was under pressure, and delivered a plan to reduce the pressure by creating a new income stream for us - to pay for a cleaner and to help us buy our first car by converting three of our rooms into bedsits. It made a big difference to our quality of life.

1968 marked a significant ecumenical development: a Catholic priest, Father Ralph Woodhall, knocked at our front door at 67 Shaw Street. We welcomed him in, had a cuppa, and he enquired about possibilities of co-operation. A little time later I was asked to speak to the University Christian Union, and challenged them to help us meet the challenge offered by Father Woodhall. Behind the Vicarage was a tarmacadamed and enclosed square owned by the local Catholic primary school. Ralph procured permission for us to use it for a joint venture. Together, we put leaflets around the flats, the Christian Union provided 15 or so students, and Val offered to serve soup, tea and jam butties every Wednesday from 4 until 6pm for an after-school play group. It was a very practical and simple way to start the ecumenical journey.

Eddie and I ran another very successful holiday party to Ilfracombe that went with a real wow. We were beginning to consolidate our links with the local community and between some of the key people like Lotty and May with some of the congregational members including some of the young marrieds. Eddie and I had asked the bishop to extend our curacies from three to five year stints, and he agreed. I was running St Tim's, Eddie ran St Ambrose and Roger ran the Shrewsbury Club, and he was appointed priest in charge after Richard Allen had left. I began to be approached by Joe Darby the Church Warden of St George's, which was adjacent to our parish, to take occasional offices there. As these requests became more frequent, although welcomed by me be-

cause they represented extra cash injections to a heavily pressed family purse, (we survived on £8 per week and never received any expenses from the church), I began to question why I was so much in demand. It transpired that the vicar there, Norman Moorhouse, was increasingly unhappy and kept 'running away' whenever he could. The deanery clergy had started to withdraw their support, and so Joe approached me. When the Vicar finally left in December 1968, Joe was asked to see the Bishop to discuss the vacancy, after asking me whether I would be interested. I was very eager to give it a go. The Bishop's letter came on 8th February. I accepted on 9th, and was installed on 13th April 1969, all done and dusted within 10 weeks. So, my journey moved on to my first living at St George's Everton.

As I explained earlier, Richard had encouraged me to develop links with the local Air Training Corps which met in the small barracks in Everton Road. I would go on Friday evenings and hold a Padre's Hour, and then stay on to meet the officers and volunteers at the very attractive bar. I enjoyed accompanying the squadron on three annual camps as a perk! I received a small stipend plus first class rail travel, and residence in the palatial Officers' Mess. I formed several good friendships with some of the officers and cadets. It helped me to understand the long-term benefit of forming links outside congregation.

I started a small Pathfinder Group at St Tim's. Pathfinders was pioneered by the (national) Church Society and was very popular in the evangelical church community. It felt like an Anglican equivalent to the Crusaders and Covenanter Youth movements which prospered with young people in Free Churches. They produced excellent teaching material for young people. Rev Richard Bowdler was the National Director. The local Link Officer was a Rev Dick Cotton who became a regular visitor to Shaw Street Vicarage where we had established the group in the cellar there.

Pathfinders had flourished in the strong middle-class Anglican churches and so our attempt to launch a group in inner-city Everton appealed to him. There was a popular annual rally which attracted hundreds of Pathfinders to some Northern City Centre Church. We were invited to join a bus from Liverpool to attend.

I sensed there was an opportunity to strengthen the network of Pathfinder groups. I contacted the various leaders who welcomed the leadership I was offering. Pam Edis the Bishop's Secretary was leader of a large group at All Hallows' Liverpool, and Dr Peter Twinn, a Liverpool University Lecturer, led the St Mary Upton Group. They added their support to my suggestions.

After further consultations I organised two unusual events: firstly a Sausage Sizzle (a bonfire and beach games event near Hall Road), which was chaotic, but lots of fun and attended by well over 200 young people. Then not long afterwards I organised another trip to climb Moel Famau, again supported by hundreds of Pathfinders.

I thought there would be a real place for training teenage Pathfinders to develop leadership skills and through my links with Barnston Dale Camp owned by the Liverpool Girls and Mixed Clubs Organisation set up a residential weekend. This resource was developed further to serve the Merseyside groups well for several years afterwards.

These external activities served as a creative respite from the pressing challenges of serving our small inner-city parish, and I am grateful to Richard for giving me the space to focus on opportunities outside the parish.

I finish with another episode of Pathfinder involvement. I received a phone call from Les the leader of the group at St Matthew's Bootle to say that the arrangements for their weekend away had collapsed. I consulted Val, who agreed that we could allow them to use the cellar for their weekend. I can't remember how they sorted out sleeping and eat-

ing, but it went well. The now well-known Community Theologian Ann Morrissey was in that group, and so it goes to show that even in Everton we entertain 'Angels unaware ...'; or is it beware?!

Questions for reflection

In my curacy, I faced the challenge of working in a new community (the context), and had to ask how my Christian faith (text) would resonate with this. I came to feel that it didn't.

Does this tension resonate with you as reader?

Being alongside others (being with / belonging) is the crux of incarnational faith, which is different from challenging others / telling them to believe – the approach my faith had been fashioned in.

Learning to discover different ways of becoming and being Christian started a new learning curve for me. How about you?

Discovering that God's focus of salvation is greater than saving individuals opened new understanding for me.

What has helped your faith to widen as well as deepen?



CHAPTER FOUR

Vicar of St George's Everton and work with national initiatives

It was decided that since St George's Vicarage was damp, we would not move there, mainly because Penny was showing some signs of having asthma. It was agreed by the Diocese that we could live at 67 Shaw St., near Liverpool Collegiate School in the Parish for the time being, which meant that Mandy and Penny could remain at Prince Edwin Street Nursery.

St George's Church, with its proud tower, is particularly beautiful; it is very special architecturally in that it was constructed using cast iron as its main frame. It was built in 1814 by Thomas Rickman, a radical architect and Herbert Cragg, the cast iron foundry maker, on the original site of the Everton Beacon, which had been used to guide ships to the Mersey, and to give signals at times of national anxiety. It had a day school consisting of separate Junior and Infant Departments. There was no church hall attached to the parish.

The slum clearance of lower Everton which had resulted in the plan of Everton's vast back-to-back terraced housing being demolished in the late 1950s through to the mid 1960s was now creeping up the hill and ridge of Everton. It meant that Greater Everton was itself scheduled for a rolling slum clearance programme to continue well into the 1970s, forcing the Church of England to reappraise the appropriateness of its parish structure, especially as it was predicted that 70% of the resident population would be rehoused in the newly emerging outer city estates in Kirkby, Skelmersdale and Netherley. This is where new industries had been started to make the move there very attractive to many new families being offered new housing with gardens, new schools and new jobs. It was a daunting challenge.

Frank Harvey, the Diocesan Planning Officer, met me to explain that a major programme of change lay ahead of me. This resulted in him calling the clergy of the 13 parishes of lower and upper Everton to meet and discuss the situation. Surprisingly, it meant that the four parishes in the Beacon Group, namely Holy Trinity St Anne Street, St Timothy Rokeby Street, St Ambrose Prince Edwin Street, and St Polycarp would all be demolished within the next 5 years and be replaced with a new St Peter's Church. This would be built on the site of the St Peter's School which was closed. The Shrewsbury Club would be demolished and a new club built as an integral part of the new St Peter's Church.

John Stanley, Ernest Hopkins and I agreed to set up The Everton Group of Churches. Each of us was offered curates. We were all involved in the shared hospital chaplaincy to the 1000 bed Newsham Hospital, and we successfully negotiated with the Diocese to transfer our chaplaincy fees to a Group fund which allowed us to appoint a full-time secretary. Margaret Sadler was appointed to edit a new monthly magazine for the group and provide secretarial support to the clergy.

Upper Everton had consisted of 8 churches that formed three clusters: St George's, St Benedict, and St Chad Everton Valley formed one, St Cuthbert and St Saviour formed the central cluster, and finally Em-

manuel, St Chrysostom, and St John's Breck Road formed the third. Two further churches - St Simon and St Jude, and Holy Trinity - were allowed to remain for the time being, and their situation would be reviewed much later.

By working more closely together, the clergy and Church Councils were to agree which churches should stay and which would close, and this process was made the easier as some clergy decided to move to new parishes. Initially, Arnold Moon at St Benedict's moved to St Luke Formby, and Harold Cunliffe at St Chad's moved to Golbourne, outer Wigan. Within a year, I was made priest in charge of these three churches at a special service at Liverpool Cathedral. I was expected with the help of Frank Harvey and my new colleagues, John Stanley at St Cuthbert's, and Ernest Hopkins at Emmanuel, to work for a cohesive resolution to this major programme of pastoral reorganisation.

For three years, I ran in triplicate 3 three sets of Sunday Services, PCCs, Sunday Schools etc.. I enjoyed the challenge, but it raised some tricky issues as each church had its own distinctive ethos: St Benedict's was very traditional and determinedly conservative evangelical; St George's was liberal low church, and St Chad's was more central and aspiring prayer book catholic - originally it had been one of the early "tin hut" churches planted on Everton and deeply dependent on the ethos of the Oxford Movement. St Benedict's was deemed to be the most vulnerable to closure as it was due to suffer the greatest effect of depopulation as great swathes of its parish housing were due to be cleared to create open space for the newly created Everton Park. The decision as to which to retain from St George's and St Chad's was infinitely more difficult. Though massive, St Chad's complex of Church, Hall and Vicarage was in excellent condition, but eventually, it was the central location of St George's that won the day. For me as a raw and rookie young priest, it wasn't easy managing the different expectations and resentments of congregations who had been faithfully nurtured in their very distinctive and contrasting traditions as they all faced the pain of change.

Since the Shaw Street Vicarage was needed for my replacement priest in the Beacon Group, Val and I moved to the lovely St Chad's Vicarage in Sherlock Street immediately adjacent to Major Lester Primary School in April 1970.

Val was eight months pregnant. This climate of major change and uncertainty probably acted as a catalyst for an even bigger challenge to our family, as within 10 days of Wendy being born in May 1970 Val went free-fall into very serious post-natal depression.

As she faced this new reality, Val was very clear about two issues - she did not want to be hospitalised, and she did not want to receive ECT treatment.

When she was discharged from the Maternity Hospital on 22nd May 1970, she was referred to the Royal Infirmary to see a psychiatrist 2 days later. She was deemed to be at risk, and so saw psychiatrists weekly for over six months, then these reduced to fortnightly, monthly and then 3 monthly visits into 1971. I vividly remember sitting in a large waiting area with distinctive brown glazed tiling walls. When called, we went in to see the doctor, who asked Val how she was before prescribing tablets. When she was discharged after about 18 months, she was given this advice: regard yourself, Mrs Black, like a diabetic so that you manage the pills as you need – more when feeling low, less when feeling better.

I remember very vividly the several occasions when the senior folk of the diocese called. Archdeacon Wilkinson, the last of the frock coated and gaitered generation used to call at the Vicarage with his wife, with a large basket of food and cleaning materials. She would set to and help tidy up whilst Mandy and Penny were in Infants' School. Mrs Wilkinson suggested that Val attend a clergy wives' group which met at her home, and some of them used to meet to paint. Val found this group very supportive, and from it she ventured into painting.

The seeds sown then proved to be fruitful for her, initially as a way of handling and expressing her own inner feelings of her depression. Two paintings stick out: the first of a single blade of grass, painted whilst we were allowed to use a remote small farm cottage on a hillside near Ruthin, and the second of a silver moon set against a black sea and sky, painted while we were in Hastings on a parish holiday.

Again, Bishop Stuart Blanch dropped in on several occasions to visit us - normally pre-empted by a phone call along the lines of "Neville, may I drop in to see you all at the end of a match at Liverpool and before some event in a local church on Saturday night? I'll only need a coffee as I'll be having food at the do later". He would arrive and in no time have both Mandy and Penny on his knees as he read them a bedtime story, during which he was able to appraise our situation. These two interventions from the diocese give glimpses of a different level of pastoral care available in the early 1970s.

After so long, I can only remember some of the ways in which her illness affected Val: a deep appearance of withdrawal, a pervading anxiety, weight gain, moving and speaking more slowly, and a tendency to shake when things overwhelmed her. With the benefit of hindsight, I can see how amazing it was that she coped so well with baby Wendy, 4 year-old Penny, and Mandy aged 6. Several years afterwards, she wrote a small booklet "Think of the kids", in which she reflected on the emotional struggles she faced during this time including strong suicidal pressures, which she managed to resist. Val showed terrific courage and resilience during this time, especially since her much loved Aunt Lenna died in November 1971. Lenna had lived with Val's parents since Val was a little girl, and so her loss was a very big one for Val to cope with at a difficult time in her own life. Her difficulties were compounded only a year later in November 1972, when her father suffered a fatal heart attack.

Even as she came to terms with her depression, Val amazingly found the strength to talk to women's groups in church circles. We had learnt in our early discipleship formation to live as openly as possible. From this perspective she was able to explain how in these struggles that even as a vicar's wife she had times of depression and inner darkness, which often prompted a listener who had also had times of depression to stay behind for a quiet chat. These chance encounters awakened in her the realisation that there may be a field of study that she could engage with to enable her to help others to cope with depressive illness.

That opportunity came after we moved into Anfield Road Vicarage in the summer of 1973. She saw a note in the Diocesan mailing about a Clinical Theology Association (CTA) course starting in the autumn. She enrolled, but found it very traumatic as she encountered Frank Lake's radical approach to dealing with mental illness and ill health and reflected on her life experience. The sessions took place on Friday evenings at a small convent in West Derby and I was able to take her and collect her. The search inwards exposed her to great anxiety, so much so that she would shake; but under the very gifted care of Rev Oliver Horrocks she was encouraged to stay with the anxiety, and learn how to 'breathe through it'. The reflection on the sessions after we had returned home often took us into the small hours as we shared this new journey of discovery. CTA was cataclysmic for Val: it was a major breakthrough offering new tools to deal with her own anxieties. Through it, she gained confidence – and, more significantly, new resources to be alongside others facing mental ill health issues.

The large vicarage enabled us to give her a counselling room to see people and also to offer Oliver a room both to stay overnight and see his growing list of clients. It meant he was able to see clients and run a nearby training session each Thursday, to see further clients during the Friday, and lead the West Derby session on the Friday evening before returning to his rural parish in Cheshire. Oliver continued this pattern throughout our time in Anfield as Val developed her training with CTA and later on with COMPASS (Counselling on Merseyside Pastoral Sup-

port Service), which was set up in the early 1980s. She later undertook an external M.Ed, and Diploma in Supervision. She tutored many students at COMPASS, and saw hundreds of clients over a 30-year period from our home. Following her diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis circa 1984, she ceased employment and was awarded DLA (Disabled Living Allowance), which allowed her to earn limited 'therapeutic earnings'. This in turn enabled her to see clients for less than £5 per session: this was an answer to prayer to the many working class clients she saw.

Val grew in stature and calibre as a counsellor and her new insights provided me with a new tool kit for a deeper understanding of life. She once worked with a client and reached the point when the woman felt she should seek a divorce. I was appalled, but Val felt she should encourage her. It led into a long discussion in which a significant question arose: is it more important to be Christian rather than human, or to be more human than Christian. As a priest nurtured in the Evangelical tradition, this issue rocked me as I had clearly thought that I had to uphold Christian dogma over human freedom. This new insight rocked me and wouldn't go away; as we discussed the issue more, new light dawned and I became more open to this new perspective. It was another turning point, almost a conversion for me to follow the two earlier ones: the clear call to inner city ministry which we both shared, and the realisation that God's salvation included Society as well as individuals.

Somehow, we managed to get through this period with the support of Val's family, and particularly the support of church wardens Joe and Elsie Darby – more about them below.

THE NEW PARISH & ITS CONTEXT

I had an unusual start to my new ministry, in that as a curate in the neighbouring parish, I was allowed to undertake almost six months' involvement in St George's Everton before I officially became priest in charge. During the inter-regnum, I was able to be involved in taking Sunday services and funerals, and I accepted an invitation to run a

Lent course there. This period almost served as the listening and waiting period which new priests are often encouraged to experience before assessing what strategy of mission and ministry should be formulated. It was clear to me that the ministry of my predecessor had been difficult. There was a definite winding down as the unsettled priest negotiated a new pastoral position; collections had dropped significantly in the previous year; the congregation seemed to be at a loss and suffering low morale, and the whole place needing 'lifting and moving on'. The parish needed an infusion of leadership and a rebuilding of community, which with energy and enthusiasm I sought to inject!

I hit the ground running on 14th April 1969, and was quite clear as to what opportunities and threats awaited me. I developed a strategy which had four goals

- get alongside the indigenous council tenants
- get involved in the issues for this changing community
- take an active part in the parish church school
- make the church – both building and congregation - more user friendly for the local community

I had formed a strong impression that the congregation was 'eclectic', i.e. most lived outside the parish, and not within in it. Some who had lived in the parish had improved their lot by buying houses in more settled areas, and yet remained loyal to St George's, their former Parish church.

This tension between those who lived in the Parish, and those who had moved on but sought to keep their links with St George's needed to be addressed: my recognition of the significance of 'culture' had started, and it took time for me to analyse and understand the distinctive cultures of the eclectic congregation and the indigenous community.

When I arrived at St. George's, the bulk of the parish property was still intact, although large tracts were facing imminent demolition. The Primary School was also set in a very established traditional mould with two long serving heads: Mr Fletcher (Juniors), and Miss Sawle (Infants).

So, in the midst of change, both Church and School projected a strong sense of stability, along with a subtle subtext of 'we're OK and happy to continue going along in our old familiar ways'.

The parish was in the throes of the major slum clearance programme that was stretching up the hill from lower Everton. The Local Authority had decided to make a compulsory purchase of more than 1000 properties in the St Benedict area in the 1970s, many of them established terraced housing. These were to be replaced by about 15 multi-storey blocks and a substantial estate of maisonettes which took over seven years to fully implement, giving the whole area a distinct feel of being run down, and in transition. The population of the three combined parishes was to be reduced by 66%. The programme had already created in the new parish 2 multi storey blocks - Creswell Mount, circa 5 floors, and St George's Heights, 12 floors - in addition to the 1930s development of Sir Thomas White Gardens. Broadly speaking, it was a monochrome working-class community where most of the employment had been at the docks, Tate and Lyles, Bibby's, and British and American Tobacco Co. All these locations were due for either demolition or significant reduction in the labour force: e.g. the Docks reduced from 20,000 dockers to fewer than 1000. The density of owner occupation was quite small, and closer examination of the congregation revealed that support from the Council-owned properties that formed most of the housing was extremely low.

There was a considerable network of extended families and there was a clear division between Catholic and Protestant communities. The mix had been 80%/20% RC/Protestant in lower Everton and it was about 50/50 in the parish. The parish had 4 primary schools and 2 Comprehensive schools - John Hamilton, and Notre Dame RC. There were 5 churches: Our Lady Immaculate RC, Mount URC, Netherfield Road Methodist, Protestant Reformers and the Anglican St George's. There was a small John Bagot Hospital which had become a psycho-geriatric unit of around 100 beds.

Of the 70 or so congregation on the electoral roll, only about 20% lived in the actual parish, and the rest travelled in. Of those who travelled in, 80% had lived in the parish and had chosen to move away 'to better themselves.' It became more obvious to me as I got to know them that they had been 'encultured' in the process of 'being accepted' within the mores of the congregation. It meant for example the women needing to master the wearing of hats for church, and the men suits and ties. Those who left and were able to procure finance to buy their houses crossed a divide between their own working-class roots and values and the lower middle class values which 'house ownership' conveys where money management, thrift, attitudes to police as guardians of property, and the beginnings of personal aspiration were all part of the middle class package to which they now aspired. Whilst some might accuse me of being harsh on this community, it did mean that the differences in values of the 'returners' deeply influenced the residual culture of the congregation. This became very pointed later on in my ministry after I'd been welcomed by the wider parish community. This had been mainly achieved by a very heavy involvement in community affairs, which included understanding the vast unease that the local community felt about the effective dispersion of some 60% of the community from the locality to new outer estates being delivered in places such as Skelmersdale, Halewood, and Norris Green. My involvement included being a governor and subsequently chair at Major Lester School, a governor at John Hamilton, and a Trustee of Albion House.

THE EVERTON GROUP OF CHURCHES

In the Everton Group, John Stanley felt unable to be open over infant baptism and insisted on asking families to attend pre-baptism preparation classes. If people were unable or unwilling to attend, their children were not offered baptism

It was in the early summer of 1970 that John and I had an explosive phone conversation - let me explain! Wendy had whooping cough in August as we were due to revisit on a self-catering basis a school house in the grounds of Clarendon School in Abergele where Val had worked, together with Joe and Christine Hunt and Bob and Thelma Harrington. We were delayed in starting the visit and were allowed to prolong the visit, but it meant I had to ask John Stanley to take the afternoons baptisms: it turned out that there were 22! When he took the service, John discovered that 18 of these were families that had been refused baptism at his church because of his policy. They had subsequently turned up at St George's vestry hour and been accepted by Joe Darby, who was implementing my very different policy.

To be fair to John, we agreed to differ during that fierce telephone conversation on my return, and we have remained good friends for over 50 years. He had an outstanding ministry as a parish priest undergirded by a magnificent pastoral and deeply caring ministry. Clearly there are arguments for and against both open and closed approaches. My approach is open to accusations of being too casual and undemanding, but my defence lies in the deep belief that meeting the needs of casual users of the church's pastoral ministry, especially through the occasional offices, leaves them with a positive experience of acceptance, and even pleasant memories that can be built upon at subsequent encounters. Through such occasional offices, especially within the strong webs of extended families in Everton, it was possible for the parish priest to encounter the 'family tribe' several times every year - e.g. at the 40+ weddings and 70+ funerals each year, in addition to 100+ baptisms. These encounters with the wider community helped me understand more deeply in my later years of ministry the importance of 'episodic' religion that lies at the heart of Anglican parochial ministry and which offers a unique opportunity for mission. I understand mission to be the activity of God who weaves his/her own patterns of love and grace in the lives of all his/her children since and before birth. Mission is the work that arises from the Lord's Prayer where Christians pray each day

that God's Kingdom may be built on earth as it is in heaven: where we accept others as they are, we are playing our part in God's Kingdom activity in the world.

KEY PLAYERS / PARTNERS AT ST GEORGE'S AND ITS PARISH

I was greatly blessed in the support given to me by Joe and Elsie Darby, my church wardens. Joe's support was whole-hearted from the very beginning, and it continued throughout my time at St. George's. Because it was so important, I want to share a greater understanding of Joe's background and personality here.

Joe was born into a large family where his father was a docker. The family had moved into one of the new tenement blocks, Sir Thomas White Gardens. These were built on land that had been part of the large St Domingo Estate. This was established out of proceeds of the lucrative slave trade and tobacco and sugar industries, which Liverpool merchants had developed in the 18th and 19th centuries as its importance as a port began to grow. Joe attended St George's School, where from the age of 11 he became monitor to the headmaster Mr English for the last 3 years of his time there. He went on to work as a builder's jobber, until he secured a job as a docker and eventually went to work for Smith Coggin as a 'counter-off clerk' responsible for the distribution of cargo from the ship to local merchants.

After marrying Elsie - also from St George's - they lived in rented rooms, as was typical of that time, until they could afford to buy a terraced house in Hayfield St. He used to paint the house exterior white every Whit bank holiday weekend, until they bought a house in West Derby some 6 miles away. He was always smartly dressed, numerate, well organized, and very able with bookkeeping. Within months of my appointment, and aware of my whole hearted commitment to the new work as well as his awareness of Val's poor health whilst pregnant and

raising two young daughters, he pressed me to take a day off each week, and he volunteered to run the Vicar's 'vestry hour' to relieve me. St George's was a well-established 'communal' church, there to serve the whole community and not just its members. It was very popular for weddings, baptisms and funerals, which meant that the vestry hour was an important hub as a point of contact between local families and the church. There were, on average during my time at St George's, approximately 100 baptisms, 40 weddings and 70 funerals per year. After a short time, I appointed Joe as parish clerk, which amongst other things meant he completed the parish registers which I simply had to sign. It was immensely helpful to me, to the extent I viewed him as a lay curate.

That he took me on a pub crawl to all the 15 pubs in the parish within my first week indicated he shared my commitment to be a priest to the whole Parish, and not just a chaplain to the congregation.

Hazel Williams proved to be another key player. She and her husband Norman starting coming to the evening services at St. George's a few months after I had started. They had met when he was a driver and she a conductor on the City bus service. He had worked hard and became a very senior manager. They lived in Orrell Park but Hazel had lived in Sir Thomas White, a huge tenement block in the parish, as had Joe Darby. Norman and Hazel had no family and Hazel didn't need to work. I was very keen to get an early foothold in the local community and wondered whether I could start a Pensioners' Club. George Martin, the Warden of Albion House, offered me free use of Albion House, Hazel offered to lead a group, and this gave rise to the 49 Club (so named because the target group was people 49 years of age and above) which met on Tuesday afternoons. It was an instant success and succeeded in attracting Flo Ball, and her daughter Young Flo who had flats in 'Tommy White's'. We had a simple formula: sit and natter around tea and biscuits, then the essential bingo.

A little later, Val got a small part-time job selling welfare foods in the local clinic which she had to attend two afternoons each week. To promote sales, I visited the 49 Club to sell mainly Ribena until I added toilet rolls which I bought by the sackful! I'd use my visit to build bridges with the '49ers'. In c.1972 Hazel and Norman suggested we put on a Christmas Day Lunch for lonely pensioners. It was too demanding to repeat but I had by then developed a good rapport with the '49ers'. Some responded to my invitation to attend the monthly evening 'Family Favourites' hymn service which I started within a year, and which attracted over 100 attendees.

When I introduced an annual summer holiday, several '49ers' came to the holidays. On reflection it is now clear that I had decided to run a two-tier approach, developing parallel activities for the 'non-church' community groups, and the congregation that chose not to join in with my community initiatives. As a fledgling Vicar I failed to discern that this separation between church and community wasn't ideal. The same tension had not arisen at St Tim's, and elsewhere within the Beacon Group Team when we created good links with the community the congregational leaders welcomed the growing impact of these. The relative success of our contact with the local community had shown me that this strategy had real benefits for both church and community.

The story of how Jean Brennan became involved in St George's is, in my judgement, a simple paradigm of incarnational ministry. The starting place is important: it is in 'the world' or 'the community' and based on a strategy of 'going out to' rather than 'bringing or fetching in'.

In Jean's case the initial encounters took place in Major Lester School where my 3 children were students alongside her son Sefton. At St Chad's Vicarage, where we moved to, both Mandy and Penny initially attended Prince Edwin Nursery & Infant School where Mrs Wakefield was head. It admitted children from three years old, but they then transferred to Junior departments at nearby schools, which incidentally were all providing education from 5 -11. Since Major Lester School was next

door to St Chad's Vicarage, and Val's health was poor, it made more sense for our children to attend there rather than St George's School which was next door to St George's Church, but a good way from our Vicarage. With benefit of hindsight, I realise now this may have made a statement to the local community that our family wanted to be part of the local community rather than be separate and go to the parish school.

Everton was judged by the City to have need for 'radical' provision for early learning, and within 800 yards of Prince Edwin School, there was also the Everton Road Nursery which provided care for babies and toddlers up to to 3 years of age. Both these resources were educational prototypes that were later introduced more widely.

As all the pupils and staff had to pass the Vicarage front door to access the school, it was easy to develop a nodding acquaintance with staff very quickly. I approached the head and said I'd be interested in being involved in the school in any way he felt would be helpful. He explained that he was about to retire and it would make more sense to meet the new head. When Miss Louise Gossage arrived, She actively welcomed involvement by me, parents and the wider community. She was committed to an emerging "Home / School / Community" philosophy being pioneered by Dr Eric Midwinter at Liverpool University. She used this platform to invite parents to attend the Friday Assembly which soon became an opportunity for each class to devise a theme, which they presented. I had the privilege of being made a school governor, and the further privilege of being able to make a 'gospel' comment. Jean attended these regularly. Louise used this parental involvement to build bridges between the school and the local community from which emerged several community initiatives: pensioner parcels, ecumenical developments, St Georges Day Festival to name but a few. All these activities provided Jean with stepping stones to eventual church membership some eight years later. Jean, and later husband Jimmy, welcomed this involvement as it enabled her to integrate into the new commu-

nity which she and her family had joined. They actively supported the school's evening socials for parents which clearly helped to cement the links between school, family and community.

There was then a series of inter-related connections: we formed a small group to go swimming on Mondays when Jimmy and Jean came with Sefton, Bob and Thelma Harrington came with Martin and Christopher, and Val took Mandy, Penny and Wendy. They were joined by a single mum, Flo, who brought her son Richard, who Jimmy patiently taught to swim. Jean and family joined in the annual Parish coach holidays

Again, after the 1978 Mission I wanted to start a monthly pensioners' group. Jean was a key member of the small leadership team. I was able to attract only 8 to the first night, but when local people saw that the leaders were also from the local community that encouraged the original eight to recruit many more, and so very quickly the group grew to about 25-30. I was learning how to operate in a strong group/tribal culture.

Through this long process, Jean joined the growing 'fringe members' of St George's which I had been patiently developing. It took about 6 years to nurture - all based on a growing understanding in me that incarnational ministry demands time and patience in engaging with people. It was driven through a strong mix of 'fun and faith' which I believe to be the hallmark of Anglican parochial ministry, which has responsibility for, and yearns for the involvement of, all the residents of the parish.

Fred Wilkes became another key player in the mission work at St George's. I first met him around Christmas time 1969. He lived in a terrace house off Mere Lane and was a helpful neighbour to Mrs Gallagher, a regular attendee at the midweek Wednesday morning Communion. She was sympathetic to my community outreach and suggested that I should visit Fred and Ann who lived opposite. She might even have made the initial introduction. It was an eye-opener! On entering the front room I was confronted by an enormous Christmas Tree decorated

ed with over 300 fairy lights. On further enquiry, Fred explained that he loved Christmas and always bought an excessively large tree which had to have both the trunk and top cut to allow it to be wedged between floor and ceiling. Fred was production manager at Hartley's Jam in Aintree. He'd been promoted to the rank of Sergeant in the Army as a National Service conscript. He had no links with the Church, but he warmly welcomed me and warmed to my endeavours to build stronger links between the church and the community.

This presented me with a dilemma – what weight should I give to involving in the work of the church a local guy like Fred who welcomed the friendship I offered him? He was willing to become involved, and he brought with him that 'resonance' with the local community that I craved to nurture, even though I knew it would create tension with the culture of the eclectic congregation anxious to preserve the status quo. This dilemma illustrated the challenge which lay at the heart of my ministry at St George's: how to welcome local people into a church that was dominated by people who had moved away from the parish, and who had acquired new cultural mores which could act as a deterrent to welcoming locals.

Clearly the hectic period of holding in plurality the work of the parish and setting up the EUTP (Evangelical Urban Training Project – more about this below) fully absorbed my energies. Andrew Scaife arrived as curate in 1977; he was a quiet but very able priest from Wycliffe Hall, after reading his first degree at Oxford. We discussed a Parish mission for 1978, and started negotiations with St John's Durham to send a team of students and a staff member to lead this. At this point too, the initial funding resources of EUTP were reducing: for example my full-time secretary was replaced by a part-time one. As a result of reduced funding, the workload also decreased, and so I had more space to concentrate on developing a mission strategy for the Church. This involved continuing and intensifying my community involvement, not least to support the community in the face of massive change as a result of the City's programme for renewal.

COMMUNITY ALLIES & COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES

Almost the entire Everton area was committed to a massive Slum Clearance Programme with wholesale demolition and the provision of a major Council house development programme. In the face of such community upheaval, the City's Community Development officer, Joe Daniel, convened a meeting and suggested that three new local community areas (St Domingo, Whitefield and Breakfield) set up community councils and link up with the already established Anfield Community Council. Soon all three clergy - John Stanley, Ernest Hopkins and myself - were appointed chairs of these, and so we found a significant percentage of our time was spent in community involvement. I was able to justify this because I had had an inner conviction that a programme of heavy community involvement would be necessary before I could expect congregational growth from the local community, and so I threw myself into a series of community projects.

The first project was to initiate a St George's Day Festival: it would have been very risky these days and easily (mis)interpreted as a Little England project. I was particularly supported by the Head of Mandy and Penny's new school, Major Lester Primary, which was next door to St Chad's Vicarage where we moved in April 1970. Miss Louise Gossage's highly innovative strategy as Head further fuelled my determination to invest a great deal of time and effort into community involvement. She was seeking to foster closer links between the school, the home and the wider community, and I saw this as parallel to my incarnational ministry. I became chair of Governors and in developing an excellent working relationship with her, the staff and pupils, I was able to gain their trust. Louise invited me to attend the Friday morning assembly at which each class made a presentation in rotation. Beside the customary remarks of appreciation at the children's involvement, I often went on to make a

simple gospel connection. Eventually, I was invited to meet with staff at the end of each term and plan the theme of the following term's Friday assemblies.

In planning the St George's Festival, my intention was to build a bridge between Church and Community, promoting and projecting a more incarnational image of the Church. It resonated with the working class 'splash' rather than 'thrift' culture, giving an opportunity for lavish celebration – and it worked! A dinner was organised, as were a special Songs of Praise hymn service, and a Schools Festival for the community. I was delighted and amazed at the response of the local schools -all the heads of the 12 primary schools accepted my invitation to a meeting to plan the festival with three elements:

- a five aside football knockout competition (for boys only in those days!)
- a girls' hand ball knockout competition
- a music festival in the church, when, over two services, 1000 children would take part.

I had to use the church, but rather than offend the congregation by using the sacred sanctuary as the stage, I persuaded Joe Darby and Fred Wilkes to unscrew the metal feet of the church pews and turn them all backwards - it took them several nights! We were then able to use a makeshift stage at the rear of the church for the Schools Festival performance.

The Festival became a very successful annual event involving all the local primary schools, including the only Roman Catholic school. Amongst other things, the festival performance gave the RC primary school their first 'authorised' attendance at a non-RC church. Also, after the first year, there was no need to turn the pews around, because internal reordering, including re-siting the choir stalls at the back of the church and removing the pulpit completely, meant there was a large open area at the front that came to be used for a variety of events.

With the benefit of hindsight, I realise that the ethos of the congregation did not see the need for this 'non-church' community involvement, but I had succeeded in convincing Joe Darby and Fred Wilkes of the merits of this endeavour.

The next significant collaborative venture was to address the needs of the elderly, many of whom had lost their intimate terraced housing street communities to find themselves in high rise flats. I raised the issue with the local clergy. We estimated that there were over 1000 living mainly alone within the parish. We decided to raise £1000 between our churches to make up a £1 Christmas gift parcel, which meant buying 1000 bags of sugar, tea, biscuits, Christmas puddings, sweets etc.. We decided to use St George's Church as the warehouse, and having already created a new cohesion among the local primary schools, we asked them to be involved in packaging the parcels and delivering them.

Imagine the scene: pews stacked with individual items with two pupils per pew who were able to pass a packet into the bag carried by a string of pupils doing the rounds. We were able to involve the children in delivering the parcels. The pupils of Major Lester School made Christmas cards for each of their parcels before distributing them to the Sleepers Hill Triangle and nearby streets. The pensioners expressed real gratitude.

In response, Miss Gossage called a meeting of parents in the new year to ask the question: should the school be involved more closely with the care of the elderly in their community? I attended the meeting and will never forget Mrs H, still in curlers with a fag in her mouth and yet still able to speak: "Miss Gossage, why couldn't we have use of the unused bike shed in the yard to have regular meetings?". Harry the caretaker offered to clean it out and then with the help of some dads they decorated it. Soon a regular meeting of pensioners took place which persisted for over 15 years. Mrs H became an impressive leader, and within a few years was organising a hotel holiday by the sea. At St George's and with the help of George Martin, I was able to ask Hazel

Williams from the congregation to start a 49 Club that attracted grandmothers and some of their daughters who lived nearby to meet for a cuppa and bingo.

A further community-based initiative was the L456 Group. After being refused permission by the Round Table to form a group in Everton, I decided to form the L456 Group by recruiting about 18 professionals who had links with the L4, L5 & L6 area. We met in the Cabbage Hotel for a pint and a sandwich each month, and the most significant outcome of this was that two of the members became Chair and Treasurer of the Rebuild Albion House project: Alasdair Fairbairn who owned a steel fabrication company and his finance director, Bob Totty.

Albion House was a large house that had been acquired by the Joneses, a church family who were heavily involved in the Scout Movement. Mr Jones, the then Scout Master, had had a major row with the Vicar, Rev Lionel Jacobs and decided to dissociate the Scout Troop from the church. They acquired a large house in Albion Street in 1931 and established an independent youth club to serve the young people of the area in competition with the church. Several years later they appointed an ordained Anglican Priest, Father Cobb, as Warden of Albion House. He built a chapel and it developed its own liturgical life there. When I arrived, Father Cobb had left, but his influence lived on: I encountered a young novice, a local boy from the parish, who had joined an Anglican Religious Order in Manchester with which Father Cobb had close affiliation. This novice's vocation had been nurtured by Father Cobb and his ministry from Albion House and not St. George's Church. George Martin replaced Fr Cobb as Warden and he continued to defend fiercely the independence of Albion House; but as the Church had no Church Hall, he was happy to welcome some use by the Church of its resources.

The Secretary to the Trustees of Albion House was the amazing Peter Tyson, a director of Tyson's Construction a long-established builder company, and long-time supporter of Albion House and the leadership that George Martin provided.

The trustees felt that the resources of the existing Albion House needed added sporting facilities. Peter kick-started an ambitious project with a gift of £10k to enable a Manpower Service Company (an innovative Government funding scheme) to be established which was sponsored by Tyson's Ltd.. The project was able to use senior tradesmen of Tyson's to recruit, employ and train young unemployed people to build the New Albion Sports Hall. Peter designed a fascinating scheme that consisted of both an indoor sports hall, a floodlit outdoor five aside pitch, changing rooms and small meeting rooms plus some student accommodation. After consultation with the nearby medical practice, a replacement surgery was incorporated along with some student flats. This would provide Albion House with rent to underwrite the running costs of the new centre, with building costs having been met from Government funds and Peter's initial £10K. It was a huge success, brilliantly conceived and driven by Peter Tyson.

I came to see the importance of recognising the independence of Albion House, and accepting it as an important 'kingdom ally' - a David Sheppard concept. I was saddened when a change of personnel eventually led to the demise of Albion House as effective independent youth provision, and to George Martin retiring.

In my view, this Church intervention proved to be disastrous, as today Albion House struggles to survive without the Community leadership that is required, but which had been dissipated by the Church's intervention.

CHALLENGES OF THE NEW CONTEXT:

INTERNAL AND ECUMENICAL

1. Internal Challenges

As I reflect on the difference between St. George's and St Tim's, some interesting issues arise. St Tim's was a small church and parish with very few church funerals, weddings and baptisms. St. George's was an established communal church/parish that had a significant and well-established ministry with the many baptisms, weddings and funerals. This confronted me as the new vicar with an important ministry to the wider parish and community rather than to the congregation.

The management of the creative tension between congregation and community presented me with some real challenges which, with the benefit of hindsight, I did not handle well. There were several occasions that occurred over the next five years that aggravated the situation. I will now attempt to explain and reflect on how I confronted the emotional challenges that I faced, within myself as a fledging vicar in his first 'living' between the competing demands and needs of the congregation and the wider parish / community.

In presenting his licence to a new vicar, the bishop hands the formal document as a scroll to the new priest with the words 'I give you this care which is both yours and mine'; the nature of that 'care' is a double-edged sword, carrying with it the responsibility to care for souls within the parish as a whole, and not just the congregation of the church.

Managing this 'tension' with my personality was a critical issue that reappeared at different times in my time at St. George's. I see myself as an innovator, with energy and enthusiasm, and a determination to achieve. I am also intuitive, able to decide quickly what is needed and harness a driving spontaneity. Whilst these can be positives, they produce in others a resistance to change. I see this as frustrating and obstructive. I'm also a very strong 'black and white' person who quickly

moves into becoming 'either/or', rather than 'both/and'. Inevitably, I run into troubled waters as I create loyal followers and strong opponents.

Opposition to my style of working became evident in several different experiences, both within the congregation and the wider community. For example, as soon as I was appointed, I established a Bible study evening at Shaw Street, initially using a set of individual Gospel booklets I'd purchased as an alternative to expecting people to find their way through all 66 books of the Bible. I used the simple method that I'd experienced with Stuart Blanch of sharing a bible passage, reading it aloud in the group and asking participating members to comment on points of resonance between their context and the text. It was quite moving, as the method allowed people to tell parts of their personal story. About 12 folk assembled and there was a lovely open-learning atmosphere as we gathered around the gospel narrative and people were able to relate it to their own ongoing human experience and context.

The group continued after St Benedict's was closed, and some of their long-established Evangelical Christians joined the group, as did Fred Wilkes, who had had no formal link to the church until fairly recently. On one evening, one of the Evangelicals emphasised in no uncertain terms that 'it was by faith alone that people could be saved' and that the unsaved would be condemned to hell! Fred afterwards blew his top to me - where was that fellow when we were struggling in the bitter cold to make St George's more friendly and welcoming to people in the parish, he asked.

This experience was leading me to question that in the inner city there might a different, more incarnational way to be the church, taking as a starting point acceptance of local people's offers to be involved in their local church. It was the start of major new learning for me, that working class people in particular need first to be accepted and wel-

comed in order to initiate the very delicate process of them saying "I would like to belong to this church". In Fred's case, it was an offer to the new vicar to illuminate the church building for Christmas.

I was having to learn new ways of recognising that mission is about God taking the first steps in enabling individuals to take their first tentative steps in moving towards a church community. It was not about me preaching the gospel at people and seeking intellectual assent, or my evangelistic efforts to confront people about their need to discover God. This approach was the reverse; of having eyes to see and ears to listen to what God was already doing in people's lives; of being alongside people on their journey and welcoming every little gesture or offering. Later on, I was to learn that belonging comes first before belief dawns and consolidates.

I was on the threshold of a massive learning curve which took me many years to embrace, integrate and own with confidence. I will illustrate the tensions between the values of the encultured congregation and the indigenous working-class community with reference to three significant experiences.

The first occurred in a most surprising manner, when I invited the Rev Dennis Downham to come and preach at St. George's. He was a Vicar in nearby Netherton who had succeeded David Sheppard as Warden of the Mayflower Centre in Canning Town in London's East End. I did this as a result of meeting Dennis at a clergy gathering where I learnt that he had been born in the Scotland Road area of Liverpool into a very poor family in late 1920s. In his sermon he explained how as a boy he and some of his Chadwick pals would come up the hill to St George's Church and play in the graveyard, sometimes - because of poverty - barefooted. At that point Mrs X, who was a deeply committed and long-standing member of the congregation stood up and shouted 'that is lies' and stormed out of church. The relationship with this woman was difficult throughout my time at St. George's, and on several occasions later she was involved in several discordant factions at my expense.

The second was a very painful incident involving my wife Val that sadly caused traumatic damage. It was about the Mothers Union, which Val very reluctantly accepted being leader of. It was a small group of elderly women, some of whom had been moved away from the parish in the slum clearance programme and who travelled back to the monthly MU meetings. Concessionary bus travel for the elderly was not available then. Bus fares were increased and they explained that they couldn't afford the cost. The issue was discussed, and a vote was taken to close the branch. Mrs X pointedly accused Val of allowing this to happen; Val's sense of this injustice was massive. It was an emotional blow to her confidence, and was difficult to manage given that she was struggling to be free from her post-natal depression. On reflection, I don't think she ever fully recovered, and always remained reluctant thereafter to take any leadership in congregational activities.

The third focussed on a social evening that I organised after a few years in the parish, having established good relations through the different community networks that had developed. I wanted a social evening to which members of the congregation as well as those from the local community would come. It went well, but there were three significant ingredients to the successful night

- it was held in a venue where there was a licensed bar
- there was a short game of bingo and a raffle
- everybody could pay at the door

On the following Sunday, a small group from church asked for a meeting at which they expressed real dissatisfaction with the social, and issued a diktat that future events would only be supported by them if

- there would no bar
- there would be no bingo or raffle
- admission would be by pre-paid by ticket only

I listened to their complaints, and decided in future to hold two different events: one with no bar, no bingo or raffle, and with tickets sold in advance, and another on licensed premises, with a game of bin-

go included and without selling tickets in advance. I felt it essential to develop this binary approach as Vicar, since I was 'piggy in the middle' and wanted in the short term to keep faith with each. The 'ticket only events' were much smaller, and the 'pay at the door' were better attended, but more patchy.

2. Ecumenical Challenges

Three significant ecumenical initiatives offered opportunities and challenges for closer cooperation: the formation of the Everton Group of Churches, the new Community Councils and the 'Call to the North'. This was launched by Bishop Stuart Blanch and Archbishop Beck, when they called all bishops in the Northern Provinces (from both Anglican and Roman Catholic churches) to meet with Free Church leaders. Anglicans and the local RC clergy had previously experienced only minimal contact at shared meeting places such as the Crematoria and Hospitals. At the CTN study group, we shook hands, exchanged names and participated fully in the study. It was magnificent!

From this a joint Lent Study Programme was developed. The Everton Group of Clergy met their Roman Catholic clergy neighbours, together with Methodist and URC ministers, and this unleashed an exciting new climate of co-operation and shared working within the St George's area. This in turn facilitated the St. George's Day Festival with local schools and the Maundy Thursday Agape which became an annual event.

On a personal level, I consciously increased my commitment to and involvement in shared community leadership with Father John Carr the Parish priest of Our Lady Immaculate. We shared the platform at very well attended community meetings to discuss amongst other things the Local Authority plans to reduce the population of Everton - an issue of major importance to the whole community. The offers of new housing in the new emerging overspill areas of Halewood, Skemersdale, Run-corn and Winsford were attractive to the young families. However, the

elderly who had lived in Everton all their lives were very anxious at the prospect of their children and grandchildren moving away whilst they remained in the area in new housing to be provided much later. It was essential that Father Jack and I stood together.

Such an ecumenical partnership was anathema to the Orange Lodges who reacted by publishing 5000 leaflets, circulated throughout the area condemning both my involvement and me personally as a dissenter of the protestant faith!

Before I move on, I'd like to visit two interesting episodes of a related nature. I became aware that there was a small group in the St George's congregation who had become Friends of Liverpool Cathedral and very much enjoyed this relationship and the outings which the Friends group undertook; it happened that they were all loyal members of the Orange Lodge.

At the same time, I started to play squash with Archdeacon Eric Corbet, and was frequently invited by him after a game to have lunch with the members of the senior chapter of the Cathedral in their small private dining room. At one such lunch, the issue arose whether the Cathedral should stop allowing the Orange Lodge to have their annual July service in the Cathedral in view of the Lodge's antipathy to the Roman Catholics. This jarred with the Cathedral especially after the great breakthrough in relationships between the two Cathedrals after Vatican 2 and CTN. Dean Patey invited me to argue the case for the Cathedral continuing to allow the Orangemen.

I used in my advocacy the case of my congregation members who saw no distinction between being Orangemen and also loyal Friends of the Cathedral. I supported my case by stating that as I understood it, just as any 'non worshipping' members of a parish had the right to attend and speak at the annual meeting so the Cathedral had the obligation to hear some of its members arguing for the Orange Lodge's right to have their Service in the Cathedral. To his credit he conceded, and I was invit-

ed to preach at the next Orange Service in the Cathedral – where I was able to outline my growing commitment to greater rather than lesser ecumenical co-operation with the RC community!

The Dean allowed the Orange Lodge to continue to have an annual service in the Cathedral, but the Cathedral chapter withdrew that permission a few years later.

The second episode was my involvement when the redundant St Polycarp's church was subject to an application to be sold to members of Ian Paisley's Denomination. The Rev John Patterson objected, and I opposed his objection: we were both subsequently summoned to appear before a special committee of the Church Commissioners at Church House in Westminster to argue the situation. As it happened, I won the argument and the sale went through.

REFLECTION ON THESE CHALLENGES

All these episodes underline to me some of the cultural tensions that I experienced as I worked hard to invite local people from the community into a congregation where a strong group of people dominated who had 'moved on and away' from their own local roots and had chosen to negotiate the 'cultural initiation or circumcision' that was necessary before they themselves were accepted in their new surroundings.

Over the years, I have reflected greatly on this delicate but important issue, and as I accepted invitations to work as a trainer in other locations, notably the Lake District, and North and South Wales, I have noticed similarities to my Everton experience. In the Lakes, for example, indigenous members of Lake District village congregations often made a clear distinction between themselves and retirees from urban communities; they labelled the latter 'off comers'. In Wales there were subtle tensions between the indigenous Welsh and incoming English settlers. In theological terms the Biblical tensions between Jew and Gentile

helped me understand this in the sense that some Anglican congregations might be called Jewish in orientation nature whilst the parish is clearly gentile.

The analysis was borne out by my work

- with the Evangelical Urban Training Project (EUTP) between 1974 and 1981, when I ran about 35 Urban Workshops in different major city situations, which involved undertaking Parish audits in order to understand the local mission context better
- with the Northern Ordination Course (NOC) between 1982 and 1989, when I assessed over 200 parish audits which all first-year students from across the whole of the North of England were required to submit
- as part of a five-year engagement with parishes in St Asaph diocese in North Wales and St David's Diocese in South West Wales, as well as a special project in the Carlisle diocese where a parish audit approach revealed similar disparities.

Almost without exception, congregational attendance/membership was drawn (often by as much as 75%) from the 'owner occupier areas' of parishes.

I formed the view that in negotiating with a bank or building society, the mortgage applicant has to move into the 'new world' of fending for oneself and having to leave the priorities of the group into which you were born behind. I reflect that I experienced this switch from group to individual mores most powerfully in my own case when I won the scholarship to the grammar school in 1947 and 'left' the Waterworks Street gang, most of whom went to the local secondary modern school. I formed new friends and sadly left the former pals behind. The move into house purchase accelerates other attitudinal or cultural changes that begin to strengthen the rapid move from 'gang/group' to individual orientation. The lender sees you as a customer: this carries a new attitude to 'your property' which has to be protected and cherished. Even attitude to the police changes, as now the police are there to protect

your property. Some Christians observe this is a natural progression of individuals becoming Christians, but I argue that this is a socio-economic change rather than a faith-related change. My colleague, the late Jim Hart who succeeded me in EUTP, argued that within this process that the values of the Daily Telegraph shaped this process rather than a deeper understanding of Christian initiation!

Josephine Klein, one of the first British-based practitioners to explore group process, sharply identified several contrasts between working class and middle-class values/cultures, including focus on the individual rather than the group, and mobility as opposed to immobility. Once property ownership is acquired, the possibility of movement away is built into the aspiration towards self-betterment. This contrasts with the choice of many in working class communities to stay loyal to the community of which they are part, pulled by the attraction to remain and keep the close relationships that have been developed over many years intact.

Understanding the power of loyalty to group is quite complex. Even in my own family, I detect a split in aspiration, caused by the death of my father in 1939. Between roughly 1935 and 1939, the small family business of hauliers had moved from horse drawn vehicles to motorised vehicles and the increasing wealth in the family which the two older children Jack (who was heavily involved in the business) and Joyce (who was supporting mother) greatly enjoyed. It's discernible that they were happy to remain in that artisan culture, and were content after the war ended to remain in rented accommodation, and in the same jobs, respectively as driver and telephonist.

The remaining four, Maisie, Ron, Min and myself on the other hand all aspired to house ownership and career enhancement, and their children to university education. Working class people in my experience in Everton and Central Liverpool also showed two contrasting attitudes: whilst some sought to break free from their roots and aspire to middle class life - which inevitably entailed moving to enhance employment

prospects – others chose to remain rooted in their local community. It is also true to say that others – especially the women – are denied the luxury of this choice on account of poverty in its various guises.

I was able to observe the culture of group loyalty in both Everton and, later, in central Liverpool: in each location, very strong communal cultures developed. Often, it was discernible that a strong grandmother, living in a terraced street, would over the years be able to persuade landlords to let vacant properties to ‘accepted’ family members, which over time meant that a strong clan-like culture developed. Once ‘initiated’ into the family clan, there was strong but subtle pressure to remain loyal to the ‘learnt’ values of the clan. Decisions about partners, jobs, football allegiance, religious affiliation, and conformity became dominant.

In my time as curate in Everton, recognition of the enormous influence of Lottie and May as dominant grandmas in their groups was key to enabling any initiative to succeed. There were equally powerful matriarchal individuals in St. George’s parish in the 400 unit Sir Thomas White Gardens tenement, in Soho Street, Bull Ring, Gerrard’s Gardens, Kent Street, and Myrtle Gardens. In each of these communities, enormously strong loyalties and communal belonging were demanded, imposing deeply held allegiances on all group/clan/gang members.

Klein identified other traits, such as strong affinity to retain a fascinating ‘separation’ of male and female roles, so that even after courtship and marriage men and women retained a strong commitment to remaining in single sex groups. The most significant feature that Klein identified was the ‘splash philosophy’ where local communities learnt how to break out from tough living conditions to celebrate. Such occasions included the Orange Day celebrations for Protestants on 12th July, and St Patrick’s Day for Roman Catholics.

A contemporary of Klein’s, Basil Bernstein, looked at speech codes in working and middle class communities, where he distinguished between elaborate (E) and restricted (R) codes: E was geared to equip for

universal understanding and competence and so E aspired to mobility, whereas R remained local, and because of limited vocabulary R code makes greater use of tone and gesture to assist communication. In Liverpool, for example, R code communication often uses “Yer know” as a way of checking that the listener is following the condensed and truncated conversation.

Likewise, there can be a whole range of different meanings and interpretation attached to a single word: for example, when one scouser stays to another scouser “you b*stard”, the meaning depends upon understanding the tone/gesture of the communicator: it could be a term of endearment or of abuse. In E on the other hand, the emphasis is on the precise word itself, and its meaning is universal – a term of abuse. R code speakers are not confident outside their known locale. When the middle-class E listener listens to an intense R conversation with another R, they find it difficult to follow the gist of the conversation, and the meaning is often lost because R conversation uses tone and gesture as well words to communicate. From my experience, it is as if R speakers cross the lake of communication by using submerged and hidden stepping stones (the tones and gestures): the E listener does not have these tools.

Clearly these observations relate to that period of my involvement between 1964 and 2004 in Inner City Liverpool, where vast economic and social change has already happened, but some of the features of community life which I experienced can still be discerned in the communities where rented council housing persists.

Despite so much change, a basic issue remains: many Anglican Churches/congregations have grown a culture more sympathetic to middle class values and E speech code. To join these, people have to embrace or undergo a subtle initiation before either they are comfortable themselves or are acceptable to the ethos aspired to and created by either clergy or lay leadership in those congregations. The result of this formation is that Parish Churches are often atypical of the indigenous

communities in which they are set. In the past, I have used the distinction between Jew and Gentile to define this difference, but some challenge this as inappropriate. Some would also argue that it is less easy to differentiate between middle and working class as so many economic, social and cultural changes since the post war years have eroded the traditional differences. Increased access to house ownership, higher living standards, and increased access to higher education have allowed many working class people to 'cross over' to middle class values and increased aspiration for themselves and their children.

My experience suggests however that those working-class people who move into middle class housing areas but who remain 'loyal' or 'committed' to their working-class roots are still identifiable to the priest who is able to read the 'signs' of that residual bias. Such signs might include maintaining strong ties with extended families, which remain for them a higher priority than any newer commitments to church affiliation, and the preference for gang/group activities - especially when there are opportunities to celebrate. This tendency can be interpreted by their middle-class friends in the local congregation as going over the top.

There is a subtle inkling in working class people towards spontaneity and 'instant acceptance': I remember visiting a church member married to a non church member husband. Flo was ill and I'd arranged to take communion to her at home. On my arrival, the husband showed me into the front room while he withdrew to the back kitchen. My instinct suggested that I should offer him to join us. He was not confirmed but clearly appreciated this invitation to share the bread and wine with us. Later on, I learnt how much he had appreciated that invitation. I suspect that on my arrival he expected to be excluded rather than included.

FRIENDLIER CHURCH AND FABRIC RENEWALS

When I introduced Fred from Leadenhall St (part of the terraced housing built on the 1850s) to Joe the churchwarden, they gelled instantly.

In my enthusiasm to build stronger links with the community I had a strong urge to project a more friendly image of the church. I'd already has access to a good poster writer who designed a new poster for the Church Notice Board; this had a good position on the main Heyworth Street on which I had posted 'The new vicar is keen to visit the sick at home'. That drew an unusual comment from a parishioner: "that's new, the last vicar didn't"! I pressed the comment further to learn that a previous bachelor vicar did the parish visiting with his mother who had a reputation for commenting on the quality of the biscuits offered in the visit. 'My son prefers chocolate biscuits please'! Several times I heard that St. George's was 'high church' which puzzled me as clearly it wasn't catholic or high liturgically. As I pressed the comment further, 'high' meant 'high class'! Could it be that within the community memory, there would have been stories passed down that the pew renters were allowed to purchase pews in the nave, where the poor had to sit in the gallery? I wonder!

I had an idea to see if we could illuminate the church externally. I shared the idea with Joe and Fred from which conversation the suggestion emerged that I should seek the help of the City Lighting Dept. which was in Kent Street in central Liverpool. I went down to the Depot, received a warm welcome and was promised that I could borrow four sodium street lights. Joe and Fred were delighted. They added that we could try and acquire some strips of coloured lights suitable for outdoor use.

Fred bought the electric cables, plugs and in a bitterly cold week before Christmas the three of us assembled our external illumination of the church. Joe wanted to go further. He had a dream of attaching an illuminated Red Cross to the prominent tower of the church which would be visible from across the Mersey. In no time, a nine foot tall aluminium case was made, and fluorescent tubes were added to the casing with a red plastic front. The next task was to plan how to fix this large cross onto the outside of the church tower. We had to assemble a team! Charlie Sass who lived near the church and who worked at the Ford car factory willingly offered to help: and the recently arrived curate, Rob Johnson, who was built like a front row rugby player, was very keen to be involved. It was a tricky job, and required the team to split, with two on the roof of the tower. The base of the church flag pole was used as a pulley on the rope that was dropped over the side of the tower. The team at the base had to secure the ropes to the cross. It was slowly hauled up – Rob was the very strong anchor man!. Once the cross reached the window level in the tower, and was anchored in position, the team from the tower went into the clock room, and securely attached the cross and the electric cabling to the window arches on the tower. Once lit each night on a timing switch, the Red Cross soon attracted very appreciative comments from many in the community. Some conservative members of the congregation were less impressed. The cross survived several years until senior Diocesan staff instructed that it should be lowered and scrapped.

In the meantime, I wanted to work on making the Church building more friendly to the local community. After the success of the illuminated building that first Christmas, Fred, Joe and I wanted to press on. I had by this time been appointed to the governing body of John Hamilton School, where deputy leader of the Labour run City Council, John Hamilton, was chair, and a dynamic Frank Byrne was head. The school was in fact named after John's father, also called John Hamilton. He agreed that John Hamilton would hold their Upper School Christmas Carol service in the Church. I was able to talk to Mrs Janet Cook, who

led the Art Department, and she agreed to design art work to display at the service. The metal tie bars across the church, and which could be accessed from the gallery, enabled her and her students to design eight magnificent 6ft long translucent drapes depicting Christmas themes. On seeing these hung mid-December, Fred was enthused and suggested that we should purchase 10 pink plastic 8ft. trees with appropriate fairy lights. The locals were delighted - but conservative members of the congregation complained "Vicar, the Church is like a Grotto".

One of my duties as Vicar was to appraise the condition of the church fabric, and after a quinquennial inspection it was decided to explore an appeal to central funds to undertake a relatively major fabric renewal programme. This led to the roof being treated to a new waterproofing process, new internal lighting, a re-ordering of the chancel with relocating the choir stalls to the rear of the church, removing the organ and purchasing a new Allen electronic organ, thus creating a rear space for social use, and a new kitchen and toilet in the former clergy vestry. This wasn't the ideal location, but it was the most cost effective because it meant creating new drains which were more easily installed there. New carpeting was laid throughout, and a new wooden altar, clergy reading desks, chairs and communion rails were designed to create a much more open and attractive layout. The two brass lecterns were restored and one served as a pulpit. It gave me great satisfaction to achieve this re-ordering.

Soon afterwards, the City Council funded a major re-ordering of the churchyard which had a vaulted grave yard. No bodies were exhumed, but both the vaults were infilled, and many of the wonderful inscribed York stones were used to make a new path into the church; others were placed upright against the boundary wall to the school, and the wonderful Lychgate was repaired and repainted. Altogether, the upgrading and renewal of the interior and exterior of the Parish Church equipped it for another period of service to the community. Inevitably - as far as I was concerned - it sent a strong message to the PCC that the new Vicar

was concerned to address both the internal needs of the congregation and to enhance the Church's involvement in the emerging new Everton rising from the devastation of the slum clearance programme.

As the result of the National Government's Plowden Report, Liverpool was granted £1m to build eight new inner city primary schools to replace 19th century schools. St. George's was included in the list. There was a long period of preparation – which included an amusing episode when I had to point out that the proposed site had split levels. This had gone unnoticed in the plans, but the issue was subsequently addressed. I chanced my arm and wrote to the Archbishop of York, Dr Coggan, inviting him to formally open the school, which he accepted. The Archbishop was accompanied by Stuart Blanch, our very much loved Bishop of Liverpool, for a simple service in church. It proved to be a unique photograph, as within a year, on Dr Coggan's retirement, Stuart was made Archbishop of York.

I had always maintained good links with Pam Edis since her involvement with the Pathfinder programme at St Tim's, and I had arranged with her to invite the bishop to come to St. George's for the October Patronal Festival circa 1973. I had decided around 1972 to form a link with my old friend Bob Lewis, with whom I had shared a room at the deacons' pre-ordination retreat and who was then the Team Vicar of St Martins, Kirkby. We swapped pulpits, and I had arranged for Bob to come and preach also at the same Patronal Festival! Pam rang a few days before the planned visit to remind me that the bishop was coming! I gasped as I realised to my horror that I had doubled booked! The Bishop still came - as did Bob! The Bishop preached, and Bob told a story in place of the Bible reading. I'm sure the bishop was amused by the gaff, but the service went down well.

This reminds me of another gaff! The BBC had negotiated to do the Light Programme's Sunday Half Hour from St George's. The producer and recording vans duly arrived at 3.30, expecting to find a full church to undergo a rehearsal, but the church was empty! The produc-

er asked 'where are the people?'. 'Don't worry', I said, 'they will be here tonight'. To his credit - and I imagine lots of inaudible cursing - he accepted my word. The rent-a-crowd turned up and we received complimentary comments from around the world that the scousers sang up well. On another occasion, we were selected for the BBC TV Songs of Praise, but that was fully controlled by the BBC and so I was denied another gaffing occasion.

A little later, I was approached by Antony Thomas (who a few years later produced the highly acclaimed 'Death of a Princess') to be filmed in a new documentary about the C of E. Anthony had fled South Africa to move to England and go to Cambridge; whilst there, his beloved grandma died, and he had the responsibility of arranging a service at the Crem in Cambridge. He was appalled by the manner of the officiating minister, and subsequently arranged a memorial service back in Wales!

As a result of this experience, he asked if he could film me taking a funeral service. Such was his dedication to achieve this, he undertook at least 10 visits from Leeds, where he was based, to come to Liverpool and accompany me visiting bereaved families at home. By this time, I was trusted in the parish, and all the families welcomed him alongside me at the pre-funeral visits. We finally agreed upon a service, but the arrangement failed because the funeral undertakers demanded a substantial filming fee which Yorkshire TV wouldn't pay. I was however the very grateful participant of a gratis meal at a local Greek restaurant each time he visited. He always impressed me by the open friendship he offered me and as recently as 2020 - almost 50 years later - we remade contact and he offered to read my little book.

WIDER HORIZONS AND MAJOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The legacy of Richard Allen's influence on me to be involved in even wider community affairs encouraged me to respond to invitations to be involved first with the Aston Training Scheme for clergy, and more significantly with the Evangelical Urban Training Project. I had both the energy and enthusiasm to welcome such developments

(a) ASTON TRAINING SCHEME 1974 - 1990

The C of E decided to replace the 'pre-theological' courses at Bernard Gilpin and Braistead with the new non-residential Aston Training Scheme. In 1977 they appointed Rev Robin Bennet, formerly deputy at Southwark Diocese's Urban Ministry Project, to be the first Principal, with Rev Bill Ind, then a Team Vicar in Basingstoke but latterly Bishop of Truro, to be part-time Vice Principal. Robin decided to appoint a team, unpaid apart from expenses, and these consisted Rev Derrick Rowland of Derby Diocese, but latterly Senior Education Officer at the General Synod's Board of Education and then Management Training Consultant with Coverdale, and Rev Alec Knight, who latterly became Dean of Lincoln.

The students undertook study modules from the Open University, and were assigned personal tutors or mentors in their areas. They attended weekend residential courses in a variety of locations plus a summer school. I was there to represent urban ministry and mission perspectives. The ethos of the course was to enable the students to grow emotionally and intellectually. There was a very creative use of all aspects of creative culture and literature. I loved the course visits to cinema and theatre, and the use of small group work. I would have loved this approach to personal development in my own theological training which was strongly 'teacher tell, you sit and listen'. I was invited to lead

sessions in which I was expected to share experiences both from my EUTP work and also ongoing work in St George's parish. I maintained links with Aston for well over ten years.

Later on, when Derrick Rowlands was appointed as National Director of Education and Lay Training, I was invited to join a small consultancy group to reflect on the issues and challenges which he faced in his work.

(b) EUTP - 1974-81

During my curacy I had benefitted from courses run by Canon John Hunter, Liverpool's Diocesan Missioner who also formed a group called CELT - the Council for Evangelism and Lay Training. Through this, I was introduced to the idea of undertaking an 'audit' of the local parish. This involved plotting on a map the different nature of housing tenure (council owned /owner occupied, new/old property), schools, people centres such as shops, hospitals, pubs etc.. I thoroughly enjoyed this approach and conducted and described such an audit on my new parish of St George's for a CELT residential workshop. At the same time, John had been invited by David Sheppard, then Warden of The Mayflower Centre in East London, to join a study group examining the absence of working class people from the C of E congregations, and to explore what measures the church might take to address the issue. David invited about 30 people to meet him over a series of weekends to discuss further, and out of this the Evangelical Urban Training Project (EUTP) was born. A steering group was established and John Hunter was invited to be a member. I was invited to join this group in 1972, and after rather several abortive attempts to appoint its first Project Officer, John pressed me to apply for the position. In 1974 I offered to do it part-time in conjunction with my incumbency at St George's. David visited the parish to discuss the proposal with the Wardens and the Diocesan Bishop. Soon it was agreed that to compensate the parish, EUTP would fund the appointment of a full-time secretary, and duly Lyn Orrell (who had worked for CELT) was appointed. She provided me with excellent and

very professional assistance. Val my wife bravely supported even though she was still recovering from post-natal depression. Coincidentally we also had to negotiate a house move from the Vicarage at St Chads in Sherlock St to an eight bedroom Vicarage at 21 Anfield Road where the EUTP office was established. The move went well and it proved to be a happy home for all the Black family, which was a real bonus.

To start the project, I was given a list of 500 subscribers to the Christians in Industrial Areas Correspondence, edited by my old colleague Eddie Neale. I greatly valued the guidance offered from members of the EUTP steering group - some giants and pioneers in the emerging field of inner-city mission. They included the following:

CANON JOHN HUNTER. John was a very important influence in my early life as a curate and afterwards. He was Diocesan Missioner and also set up CELT, the Council for Lay Training, in the Diocese. He also got involved with clergy in-service training, and perhaps first incumbency training. I really enjoyed an assignment of doing a sociological profile of St George's, which I entered into fully. As early as 1972 he asked me to join the committee of a new project, which came to be The Evangelical Urban Training Project set up by David Sheppard, the then Warden of the Mayflower Centre in Canning Town, East London. It meant sharing train journeys to London for the bi-monthly meetings.

John was on the General Synod as a rep for Liverpool Diocese, and had been asked by Stuart Blanch to be Secretary of a ground breaking Ecumenical Project called Call to the North (CtN). Working with the R.C. Archbishop Beck, they successfully recruited the support of all the Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops who met at Scargill Retreat Centre to plan and implement the CtN programme of a shared Bible Study Programme between Anglican and Roman Catholic parishes. Our Everton Group of Churches participated fully.

REV ROY DOREY. A Baptist minister who remained a close friend as a fellow inner city ministry sojourner. His CV was quite amazing: when I was at Oak Hill Theological College, unknown to me at the

time, he was a Baptist Minister in nearby East Barnet, and whilst I am not sure now of the correct order of things, he went from there to work in the Barnardo's Residential Village in Essex, and subsequently undertook study to become a social worker. He applied for missionary work with China Inland Mission, but was rejected on health grounds. He married Mary and together they set up a residential unit for the children of missionaries abroad, with a strong conviction that these children should have a home to belong to, rather than be shunted around.

They set up a lovely home in Waddington, Surrey, in a plush house that had belonged to a millionaire. I visited them several times there in the course of my EUTP itineraries. Roy took leave from stipendiary ministry and went to the North London Poly, first as student and then as lecturer for several years. At some point, he became Headmaster of a School in the Middle East. He and Mary then returned to London to run an Alliance Residential Hostel at Waterloo in London, during which he became involved in the Methodist Central Mission as an Associate Minister. Later, he became chaplain to Heythrop College - a Roman Catholic sponsored College and part of the University of London. His ministry was so valued by the RC Principal and staff that they resisted several attempts by the RC Curia to replace the protestant chaplain with a bona fide RC chaplain.

It was during this time that we renewed a closer friendship. We used to meet at Birmingham New Street Station at about 11am and talk non-stop for five hours over extended coffee, lunch and afternoon tea breaks. We shared the joys and challenges of working in inner city communities with small congregations, and renewed our commitment to this work. He had always had quite severe health issues but laboured to the end without complaint. His wife Mary studied nursing in her forties. Together they were a very impressive couple that I loved and respected enormously.

REV JIM PUNTON. Jim (Church of Scotland) was the Youth Officer for the newly formed Frontier Youth Trust (another David Sheppard inspired fledgling project). Jim was a highly gifted theologian, with a wonderful deep-voiced Scottish accent. He developed a highly professional as well as radical Christian approach to youth work in deeply deprived urban communities.

On the several annual residential conferences that were normally held at St George's Vicarage in Anfield Road, I was always impressed how Jim would always look out for my youngest daughter Wendy, then about 6 or 7, and take her for a walk into our large rear garden for a catchup chat. Wendy never forgot those moments of loving attention afforded her in a house bustling with lots of adults engaged in earnest chat, and the wives helping Val with the food agenda for the weekend. I'm sure there are hundreds of Christian youth and social workers heavily indebted to Jim's friendship and guidance as FYT developed its national network with its annual conference at Swanwick. I would often book an hour's chat at the cramped office in East London before I was to lead one of the evening Urban Workshop sessions in the Greater London area. It became clear later that Jim was a closet homosexual who may have contracted Aids before he died in 1986 at the age of 48.

ROGER & RUTH DOWLEY. Roger was a fifth generation solicitor from leafy Surrey. When he was an articled clerk he followed a Baptist Pastor into the East street Baptist Church, where he later met Ruth, his diminutive wife. They developed a most remarkable approach to inner city ministry, which focused around the use of their home to develop relationships with young people who they nurtured in faith and friendship, and built into a dynamic Christian community. They developed in their life about three or four of these communities and, when firmly established and nurtured over approximately 10 years, they would then move house and start another. He had a razor-sharp mind and intellect, always able to frame the most searching and penetrative questions. Whilst he had a whimsical sense of humour, he lacked warm interpersonal skills which were more than compensated by his

big-hearted wife Ruth. He substantially funded EUTP. Before he joined EUTP he had worked with Rev Ted Roberts, the Vicar of St James the Less, in setting up one of the very first Housing Associations. They enabled Christians to find affordable homes in areas where they wanted to continue their own contextual ministry and mission work in that local community. It was a very strategic contribution to some inner-city Christian communities.

REV TED ROBERTS. Ted was vicar of St James the Less, Bethnal Green. Along with David Sheppard and Trevor Huddleston, he pioneered in his parish the first ordination of Local Ordained Ministers. Val and I had first met Ted and Audrey when Oak Hill College was invited to send a Mission Team to his parish in the summer of 1963. We loved it and hoped that Ted would offer me a curacy, but no offer or discussion followed. It left me, sadly, with an ambivalent relationship with Ted. This hadn't been helped when at one point in the mission he'd drawn me aside to advise that I develop an interest in art and culture as a way of helping me, as a scouse working class lad, to integrate and succeed in the Church of England. I suspect I misunderstood his intention, but it did grate!

He and Audrey had become close holiday friends with David and Grace Sheppard which left me with the impression that he forfeited some element of his integrity in order to gain the friendship of David and Grace; although with hindsight this may be too harsh.

FRANK DEEKES. Frank was the Sheppard 'working class plant' on the EUTP Committee. Frank and Shirley Deekes were bona fide East End working class people who had settled in Dagenham. He worked in the Ford factory and was an established Trades Unionist. I ran a workshop in his church, but it wasn't one of the better ones. It never really took off, and I couldn't put my finger on it. Perhaps the travelling was too demanding on me: having to leave Liverpool on the 2pm London train; go to Frank and Ivy's for tea; and then run the six-session evening workshop before returning to Euston for the overnight sleeper; and

back for the midweek communion in St George's. Equally, it may have been a mismatch of personalities, or even a cultural clash of Scouse and Cockney. Frank subsequently became chair of EUTP but our relationship never flourished, perhaps because of difficulties in scouse / cockney banter, as may have been the case with Ted Roberts.

BASIL CRACKNELL. had great sympathy for what EUTP was about, but he had no direct experience of life in inner city communities. As a dyed-in-the-wool upper middle class economist who worked as a very senior World Bank Consultant, he was often called in to assist emerging nations with their National Budgets. He brought a sharp and incisive mind to the financial needs of EUTP and devised the idea of launching an annual 'London inner city walk'. This encouraged would-be supporters from far and wide to journey to London on a given Saturday, and undertake a walk of up to 10 miles with many planned visits to places of interest and frequent 'watering holes' at churches or chapels along the route. It proved to be a magnificent and effective fund raiser for EUTP which still persists today after over 30 years, contributing in excess of £750K: another remarkable story in its own right.

MARK HEDLEY. Now Sir Mark, he recently retired as a High Court Judge leading in many complicated legal cases involving vulnerable children. Mark gave about 10 years or so to EUTP as Committee Secretary. He and his wife Erica have lived in large Georgian houses in Everton, where they raised their own children, and adopted two other children. They have made significant contributions to the local community and to St Peter's Church Everton where Mark was a lay reader. He and Erica got heavily involved in community development and the formation of the West Everton Community Council which forged new links and accelerated ecumenical cohesion and a ground breaking partnership between Anglican and Roman Catholic parishes and communities. Inevitably, as Mark's appointment to the judiciary took him away from Everton, Erica got more and more involved in different levels of

community and church life. Together for well over 30 years they have served West Everton with an amazing, sterling quality of community leadership

JACKIE BURGOYNE was an academic sociologist based in Sheffield and was a significant adviser/researcher to and for David Sheppard. She was Treasurer of EUTP but withdrew after only a few years due to pressure of work. Her contribution to the early formation of EUTP was very significant. She was a very bright and feisty academic sociologist, who had gained the trust of David Sheppard and who provided him with a great deal of support. It was sad that her contribution was so short-lived.

REV PETER HALL, later Bishop Peter, replaced Frank Deekes as Chair of EUTP when he was Rector of St Martin in the Bull Ring, Birmingham. During his time, I was able to establish the post of local trainer for the West Midlands, taken up by Rev Bob Dickinson, who was curate at St Martin's. Peter became Bishop of Woolwich and I remained in contact with him right up to his sudden death. I deeply admired and respected Peter for the way he was able to be unfazed by the episcopacy, and able to retain a strong personal touch and interest in others. He became very close and supportive of my EUTP successor Jim Hart, whose acidic humour amused and energised Peter. Jim was almost bipolar, and a very heavy drinker. Both Peter and Jim had relatives who committed suicide. Peter would ring Jim most weeks for quite a lengthy supportive phone call. I would always drop by the Halls whenever I was passing by Birmingham. I was greatly touched to be invited to speak at Peter's funeral and to this day I remain in touch with Jill his wife.

Back now to the story of EUTP's development. After consultation with members of the Steering Group, I set up a whole series of face to face meetings with clergy who might be prepared to be involved with the project. There were two other projects concerned with 'urban mission' in the U.K. One was The Urban Mission Project, led by Rev Donald Reeves, sponsored by the Diocese of Southwark, and heavily

involved with the Chicago Urban Institute. It worked with selected C of E clergy, who were given 50p, and without any means of personal identification were dropped in London to survive for 24 hours, in the hope that they would be 'conscientized' about life at the 'bottom'. They went on to do a 12 month project about urban life and the churches' response to it. The other project was the Urban Training Unit set up in Sheffield, run by Rev Dr John Vincent and sponsored by the Methodist Church. Interestingly, EUTP changed its name to Unlock and still runs from an office base in Sheffield, as does the resilient UTU to its credit]

After an initial six months visiting key people involved in urban ministry, and consulting Roy Dorey and Jim Punton in particular, I felt it was time to devise a training programme. Together we called about a dozen academic experts' to a consultation held at the Gladstone Library in Hawarden, North Wales. Roger Dorey majored on Paulo Friere's book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', in which Freire outlines a new adult educational approach to learning which emphasised group learning (rather than individual learning) in which there were no 'off loading experts' (teachers) filling empty vessels (learners). Rather, he emphasised a 'sit and share' approach during which participants discarded the imposed cultural dependence on external experts or teachers and discovered their subjectivity in a shared learning experience. It was inspirational to me personally, and more importantly the weekend consultation produced within months a six session Urban Workshop, which consisted of three key components: know your area, know your church, and know your gospel, taking six sessions spread over 6 weeks.

We printed the material and I was commissioned as sole tutor to implement it wherever I could. Over the next 6 years, I was able to set up about 35 of these workshops in cities around the U.K., including Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, London (in several areas), Milton Keynes, Bradford, Leeds, Hull, Crawley, Newcastle, Wolverhampton and Skelmersdale. It was an exhilarating programme which made considerable demands on me: in one hectic period, I conducted a workshop on a Sunday afternoon in Everton (as well as leading morning and

evening worship in St George's), on the Monday I travelled by car to Birmingham for a workshop at 7.30pm to be home by 11.30pm before catching a 2pm train to London for a workshop in Dagenham on Tuesday, returning on the overnight sleeper so as to take the school assembly at the parish school at 9am the following morning. Initially, I owned a Ford Cortina, and on one occasion whilst travelling on the M6 the gear level broke free from the gear box! On another, the accelerator jammed at 60 mph, only to be unjammed with a powerful kick, enabling me to arrive home safe and sound.

The following morning, my local garage mechanic was alarmed to find several bolts on the carburettor loose. Clearly I had an active guardian angel! Later on, I bought a black London taxi, and whilst the travelling was slower, it was more reliable, enabling me to continue with a punishing schedule, e.g. leading workshops in Hull, Bradford, Leeds and Milton Keynes by leaving Liverpool any time from 3am and getting home by midnight. Each workshop finished with a project that the workshop members had to complete within a given time. On reflection, I should have spent more time following up these projects in greater detail. Some were significant, others less so. My skills lie in innovation and establishing projects. As a single operator/trainer operating under a heavy workload between EUTP and parish, all my creative energy was absorbed in innovation, and I think with hindsight I – or the Project Committee - should have introduced some analysis and reflection on the experience that was being gained from the Workshop Programme.

At the Skelmersdale Workshop, we were challenged about the learning style of the workshops. I had thought that it would go well, as I knew that several of the participants had lived in Everton before their recent move to Skelmersdale. I thought the first session went well but was very surprised when no one turned up for the second one! Andrew Bailey, their Vicar and a gentle thoughtful person, suggested we ask the group to meet again and tell me what had caused them not to continue. We did this, and they were quite clear! "As soon as you brought pencils and paper, it put us off ...we aren't confident with our writing skills".

This was a significant wake up call to me. Again, Andrew's mediation helped, and he suggested we could redesign the material. It was an exceedingly helpful challenge. By this time, I had met Jim Hart who was showing great interest in the work of EUTP. Jim had qualified as a Town Planner but had left his job and became a youth and community worker in the Toxteth Team Ministry, where I had run one of the first EUTP workshops with Rev Mike Williams, a Team Vicar. The end project here had identified meeting the needs of the many unemployed young with whom the parish was involved. Out of this came an application for funds which enabled the Team to purchase some empty shops at which they established a drop-in centre. This considerable asset lasted for well over 20 years as a valuable resource for that Church's work in the community.

Jim Hart and I sat down to reflect on what changes we could achieve. It proved to be a momentous experience for me as we faced the challenge of replacing the pen and paper linked to the 'teach and tell' approach that Paulo Friere challenged in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. We devised a 'sit and share' alternative using the model of a group sitting together in a circle with the tutor as facilitator with an imaginary 'treasure chest' in the middle. The treasure chest represented the combined experience of every individual in the group, and the facilitator's task was to unlock the treasure chest. The learning started with questions to the group, with the strong 'in house' rule that no one spoke twice until everybody had had a chance to speak once, though people could opt to 'pass'. In the process, the individual comments built up a shared base of knowledge, which was recorded on a black board or flip chart as the group developed a shared approach to learning. Thus individuals developed confidence and the freedom to comment. Jim succeeded me as EUTP's Project Officer and used this 'sit and share technology' to shape all the resource materials that EUTP subsequently produced.

David Sheppard invited me to join Chris Smith, a Vicar in the Kirkby Team, as a member of a small commission to appraise the adequacy of ministry in the inner city of Liverpool. The commission recommended that the four diverse inner city parishes of St Michael in the City, St Brides Percy Street, St Stephens Grove Street, and St Nathaniel Windsor should be invited to form a new City Centre Team. There were huge differences in churchmanship with historic battles and hostilities in their past histories. St Michael in the City, rebuilt in the 1950s, had strenuously resisted being subsumed into St Nicholas Pier Head, but through the strong and fiery Irishman, Rev Niall Meredith, formed a close link with the Cathedral, where he became unofficial chaplain to the boys' choir. Rev Sidney Goddard had seen his beloved St Saviour's Falkner Square demolished and the funds used to build the new St Philemon's Toxteth much to his great annoyance. He had become Vicar of St Bride's whilst still managing his World Friendship empire, which involved raising the considerable funds to acquire 5 adjacent properties in central Liverpool to form World Friendship House, a student hostel for over 90 overseas students. It was a magnificent achievement. Val was appointed bursar in 1961 and we had a small flat there. I continued at Martins Bank in their tax department and helped in the parish until we left in September 1961 for me to go to Oak Hill Theological College, and Val to Clarendon School in North Wales.

St Nathaniel's and its aggressively Evangelical congregation (many of whom travelled in from South Liverpool) was led by another fiery Ulsterman, Rev Nigel Garner. This was the last of Liverpool's Black Gown churches, where the preacher on entering the pulpit took off his surplice and donned an academic gown to emphasise the importance of preaching the Word. St Nat's was built by Rev Frank Houghton who had moved into the area in the late 1880s and developed a congregation from first meeting in a cellar to build a new church. Bishop Ryle, who lived in Abercrombie Square in the 1880s attended St Nats., which greatly added to its evangelical prestige. It had a radical liturgical layout with a half circular apse behind a free standing wooden Lord's Table - al-

most a fore runner of the later widely adopted westward facing position of the 1970s. St Nat's maintained minimal contact with St Saviour's, but absolutely no contact with its immediate neighbour St Stephen's which was an Anglo-Catholic Shrine, placed under an Episcopal Ban by Bishop David in the 1920s for papist practices and the use of the Roman Missal! The hostility to both the Anglo-Catholic churches at Margaret's Princes Road and St Stephen's Grove St was fuelled by a legal challenge led by a church warden of St Brides in the 1920s achieving a successful legal writ against Rev Bell Cox who was imprisoned!

That the task of developing such a poisoned chalice into a Team Ministry later was to fall to me is another story recorded later in this book.

FURTHER REFLECTION ON MINISTRY AT ST GEORGE'S

Later in my time at St George's, we planned a mission in 1978 with the help of a student group from St John's College, Durham. We planned four aspects

- presenting the gospel through drama
- working with the elderly
- working with youth
- working with children

By this time, I was able to appoint members of the congregation for each of these teams to work with students. The drama team designed four evenings in church where they performed their sketch. These events were attended by 50 or so each night and what was very noticeable was that the locals from the parish sat near the front, laughed and were engaged with the sketch, whereas members of the established congregation sat at the rear of the church unmoved, and later criticised me for allowing the church to be abused.

The Mission programme finished on a bank holiday and we arranged a family outing to Trentham Gardens which included our small Pathfinder group. This included a gang of lively lads alongside my daughter Mandy and her friend. There was an unusual end to the day's outing as I was confronted by a Police Officer with the question 'Did you bring some young people with you from Liverpool, sir? We've rounded them up and they are in the Police Station for questioning'!

Val and I decided to go to the Police Station. Andrew Scaife my able curate accompanied the coach back to Liverpool. I obtained the names and home phone numbers of each of the young people detained, phoned Joe Darby to explain the situation to him and asked him to advise all the parents of the situation. The Police were quite helpful but explained that a boat shed had been broken into and they had to investigate. They had already established that £550 of damage had been incurred. They agreed to release the young people on my assurance that they would return to Stoke as required later. I rang Joe again and asked him and Fred Wilkes to drive down to bring the young people back to Liverpool, and to advise parents to be at the Vicarage to meet me when we all arrived home. We arrived at 11 pm, and all the parents bar one were there. I suggested that if we paid for the damage, it would ease the situation. The money was collected within two days and sent down to Stoke. The Police accepted our apologies and closed the case, but each of the young people, including Mandy, was summoned to Liverpool police station and cautioned. This incident further underlines the importance of Joe Darby's support to me during my time in Everton.

Following this mission, Andrew Scaife and I devised a Lent house group programme, which was attended by about 25 people, a mix of congregation and 'fringe newcomers'. After Easter, we called the groups together for a review session from which came a strong cry from the locals that the Church should do more for the needs of pensioners and young people. I was delighted and brought these findings to the PCC, who decided that they didn't have time to take on new work. And so the proposals fell flat. Andrew and I decided to 'hold fire'; we devised an-

other house group programme 6 months later; again the same demands were voiced, but with a significantly different outcome from the fringe newcomers: “We’ll run them”. We decided to start with an evening for pensioners in the church school hall. I invited pensioners that I knew, and 15 came. The leaders amongst them said “we know other pensioners” and at the next event over 25 came. This group of leaders devised a unique rota of leadership. There were 5. They agreed there would be times when family or local community demands should be given a higher priority over their time, and so all agreed that provided any three attend, the club could run.

This group of leaders wanted an evening keep fit class to be run for themselves and their neighbours. I found a leader and announced details in church. One of the elderly congregation’s very well-meaning members turned up, not to keep fit, but to observe; at the end, she stood and asked the members to stand so she could say grace to end the evening. A few days later, some of the local leaders collared me “What was that Vicar? It’s a keep fit group, not a Sunday School class!”. I agreed, and called a meeting of the elderly ladies in the congregation to say it was inappropriate to ‘pray at the end’ because, I argued, it was an inappropriate invasion, tantamount to a form of ‘cultural initiation’. Incarnational ministry demands a much slower process of engagement. The keep fit women were not ready. It was from this experience and others in St George’s that I was fine tuning the ‘fun and faith mix’ which I have followed and developed throughout my ordained ministry.

Jean Brennan crossed the church’s threshold during the 1978 mission, but it was a 7 year saga involving many episodes. Before she became fully involved in the life of the church. She joined the GUML (Group for Urban Ministry and Leadership) team formed under my successor Godfrey Butland and together with Thelma Harrington developed a ministry to the elderly plus a visiting scheme which persisted for nigh on 20 years before she and Jimmy moved to Kinmel Bay and became heavily involved in a Free Church before her untimely death. What a story of grace!

After the Mission, my involvement in EUTP was slowing down, and I was becoming restless. We continued with the annual summer holiday parties, and had two successful camps with Bobby and Thelma Harrington, Andrew and some families. We went to Aberdaron and also to Frosterly near Durham where some of the students involved in the Parish Mission had connections.

It was about this time that the Diocese had a plan for providing cover to both funeral undertakers and families without connections to their local parish churches: clergy were assigned on a rota system to provide cover both at cemeteries and at the crematorium. I was on the rota for Everton Cemetery in Long Lane Aintree and at the Anfield Crematorium. Participating clergy were allowed to retain the fees and simply declare them in the annual return to the Diocese. The Everton assignment happened perhaps twice a year and might only involve two or three funerals in each rota. There was one funeral in particular which jarred on me – the burial of a baby in the free/public part of the cemetery, where ash rather than soil was provided to enable cheap burials to take place. These ‘public burials’ always took place at 9am. The rota notice simply read ‘baby’ - no name! I turned up on a bleak December morning to await the family; just mum and dad came in their own car. The undertaker sent a scruffy van and driver, who opened the rear doors and lifted out a small box wrapped in white calico. I asked the parents if they would like a simple service in the chapel before the burial, to which they agreed. There was no lighting in the chapel, but he produced a paraffin lamp which he held over our three heads as I followed the service. When finished, the father carried the small box to the public grave section where there was a hole in the ashes and their baby was buried.

This experience left me with birth anger and deep distress at this almost inhuman treatment being offered to poor parents. It was to shape my ministry much later on when I became involved in the Chaplaincy to the Maternity Hospital and where I fought for a better system for ‘baby funerals’ for poor families.

I was only assigned one week's rota at Anfield Crematorium – thank God – but it was traumatic. I turned up at 10am on the Monday and was given the list for the week. It contained 40 names with ages of the deceased. Each service was allotted just 20 minutes and there was an amazing mixture of attendances ranging from a full congregation of around 60 to a small family group of six. I was not given any information about the circumstances of the death. It was so harrowing and traumatic that on the 1pm slot on the Friday I became ill and collapsed myself. Thankfully this system was changed and replaced with one where the undertakers had to contact local clergy to offer them the assignment, which enabled the clergyman the chance to make a home visit.

It is worth noting however that the benign pastoral relationships between the wider public and the ministry of local Anglican clergy has changed since the late 1970s and some 40 years later the majority of services at the graveside and in crematoria are conducted by non clergy. To me this major sociological change indicates on the one hand how too many Anglican clergy have become primarily focused on their own congregations and retreated from community involvement, and on the other hand how society has embraced a massive increase in secularism.

SABBATICAL AND INVITATION BY BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD TO ESTABLISH A NEW TEAM MINISTRY FOR INNER CITY LIVERPOOL

On coming to Liverpool in 1975, David and Grace Sheppard had set up a group to support them in David's first Diocesan appointment. We settled at a membership of 13 - hence the name. Val and I were invited to join, as were Dick and Sue Williams from Woolton, Owen and Joyce Eva from Halewood, Julian Charley from Everton, Richard and Anne Cook, (a paediatric surgeon at Alder Hey, and his wife a nursing sister at the Liverpool Royal Infirmary), and finally Richard and Pat Hamilton, (Richard was a barrister who became the Chancellor of the

Diocese). We settled on a simple two-pronged formula: to meet around a shared meal in each other's homes, and to invite one of us - not always the host - to lead a discussion around a topic of that person's choice. The group met about 8 times a year. Julian married Clare and soon afterwards they left Liverpool to take up an incumbency in Cheltenham. We had one weekend away in a B&B near Conway. The topics shared covered a wide range of intellectual topics and occasionally more personal and family issues were shared. Val my wife throughout the entire time of its existence was heavily involved in supporting people as a counsellor and as a tutor for Compass Counselling, which enabled her to coax the group into deeper levels of personal sharing.

Sadly, when the Sheppards retired, they felt they had to leave the group but the group decided to continue; sadly, too, with the passage of time the group has disbanded because only 3 of the origin group remain: Richard Hamilton, Dick Williams and myself.

In 1980, I asked David Sheppard if I could have a sabbatical, and cheekily asked if he would nominate me to attend the mid-term Clergy In-Service course at the prestigious St. George's House, Windsor, to which he agreed.

By this time, we had exchanged our small 10ft tourer caravan for a massive 6 berth Bessacar (which I adapted to accommodate 12 people to sit around), and our small family car for a Black London Taxi Cab. The latter gave Mandy the chance to tell her teenage pals that her dad was a taxi driver, rather than explain he was a Vicar!

I chose to stay at home for most of the sabbatical period, and set up the caravan as an office. I was invited to do the week long Thought for the Day slot on Radio 4 and this took me many hours to prepare the scripts, alongside research for an assignment for the Windsor Course. It meant I spent days in the caravan, and evenings and weekends with family. Incidentally the sight of a black taxi pulling a large tourer got the whispers gathering momentum when we first arrived in this new

setup in Aberdaron. Some wondered anxiously whether Irish tinkers had arrived. Alas, it was only the silly vicar from Liverpool full of young Kopites!

When I arrived at Windsor on a Thursday afternoon for the introductory weekend, I had to book in via the policeman on the gate. I was shown to an impressive study bedroom where I unpacked before joining the rest of the course members in the dining room for afternoon tea. I was offered a choice between “Indian or China please Sir”; in my nervous impishness, I asked the young waitress “Do you have any Scouse tea luv?” She couldn’t understand a word of what I said, but buxom Bertha the upstanding Housekeeper read the non-verbals and sauntered over to enquire what the difficulty was. I apologised and began to mingle with the other course members. I was pleased to recognise Rev David Wills who had served in St. George’s Huyton and then at Mossley Hill before moving to Littleover in Derby Diocese. After tea, the group gathered in the main sitting room and were introduced to the Course Staff: Dr Charles Handy, one of the Canons of St. George’s Chapel (who explained that he’d been employed in the Oil Industry and as a management consultant) and John Price who had been a senior Civil Servant. We were assigned a seminar group of eight members. The staff explained that St. George’s House had been established by the Duke of Edinburgh and a former Dean of St. George’s, Robin Phipps. The Clergy In-service Course ran for 18 months, and contained two residential elements. In addition, the house appointed several research fellows and each 19 month course was assigned a study subject: ours was to be Conflict in Industrial Society. After the first weekend there would ten days - with two sessions per day when eminent people addressed the group. For these input sessions we assembled in a magnificent Library. A duty officer was appointed to welcome each speaker and to act as host at the following lunch or supper. I was assigned to the celebrated Daily Telegraph columnist Peregrine Wolstenhome with whom I had some lively conversations over the meal. Inevitably in his column in the following

week I was castigated - but not named - as a pink communist from Liverpool! Following the lectures, we were invited to join a group to visit another aspect of conflict. I joined the group which visited ACAS.

Each day, we were invited to attend St. George’s Chapel for a morning Eucharist and Choral Evensong. We were allowed a break over the third weekend and could opt to bring our wife or friend to stay at the House, or to travel home, which is what I did.

I was allowed to leave on the Thursday and travelled home to see Val and the children whom I had missed greatly. On arrival, after a cuppa Val produced a letter marked ‘private and confidential’, saying ‘this is the only letter I have not opened’. It was from Bishop David inviting me to be the first Rector of the new Inner City Team! Sadly, it greatly impacted on my weekend home, as I phoned Bishop’s Lodge, and Val and I were invited to meet David on the Friday to discuss this amazing offer. We spent the Friday and Saturday discussing the offer and driving round the new team parish area of St Michael in the City in China Town, St Bride’s in Canning, St Stephen’s in Grove Street, and St Nathaniel’s in Windsor. I was delighted at the offer which we agreed I should accept, but I asked if I could begin in June 1981 to coincide with Wendy finishing at Major Lester School.

I found the leaving of St. George’s very traumatic and vividly remember that I was often in tears as I sang the recessional hymn at Evensong each week and passed by valued friends and parishioners.

The news of the establishment of the new Team Parish wasn’t widely welcomed by the affected parishes. Sam Pratt at St Michael in the City promptly decided to leave, Martin Gardner at St Nathaniel’s also negotiated a move and his congregation left en masse on 31st December 1980. They locked up the church and pushed the church keys through the Bishop of Warrington’s door! Bill Pugh who was a full-time teacher at Ormskirk Grammar faithfully maintained an early evening daily Mass, and weekend masses on Saturdays and Sundays. He accepted the changes. Bob Dickinson had been involved in EUTP development in

Birmingham and as Vicar of St Bride's welcomed the concept of the new Team. Andrew Scaife agreed to replace Sam Pratt at St Michael's in December 1980. By the time of Andrew's appointment at St Michael's in December, I was beginning to formulate my approach to ministry in the new team, which meant that it was possible to draw Andrew and Bob alongside Nick Edwards to devise a mission strategy for the New Team.

In early 1981 Bob, Andrew and I began to meet to plan for the inauguration of the new Team that would be established at my induction, which was planned for June 1981. We were keen to locate an Anglo-Catholic priest to take on St. Stephen's. We had agreed to make an informal approach to Nick Edwards the Vicar of St Jude's Cantrell Farm who initially agreed to take up the post, but in the event was unable to. Nevertheless, the four of us began to meet regularly to write a mission plan for the new parish. We agreed on a sound bite to run through everything we did: celebration, co-operation and communication. When Nick was unable to take up the post, the Diocese strongly recommended that we enlist Douglas McKitterick who was curate with David Diamond in London, and so he became the 3rd Team Vicar.

I had to negotiate with the Diocese on housing for myself and Douglas. We were able to locate 31 Mount Street for The Rectory, and Liverpool Housing Trust made a large house in Huskisson Street available, consisting of four flats which enabled the parish to provide a flat each for the new Team Vicar of St Stephens and the parish curate, one to be an office and the remaining one let to a parishioner.

Question for Reflection

My time in Everton confronted me with some significant challenges to 'change', and two were particularly significant: the recognition that 'Christian' formation must be able to engage seriously with the 'human', and coming to terms with the need to work ecumenically, especially with Roman Catholics, which meant for laying aside earlier prejudices.

How have you negotiated challenges to change long-held views in your own journey of life and faith? Are being human and being Christian the same thing?



CHAPTER FIVE

Rector of St Luke in the City and work in the wider community

Following the invitation to be the first Team Rector of the inner city team by David Sheppard, I had 9 months to prepare for the move. Some key decisions were made early on

- I would float rather than be based at any of the four parishes (it was originally envisaged that I would be based at St Michael in the City, but I declined that on the grounds that it might be seen as the ‘mother church’, which would impair the development of the team. Freedom from pastoral responsibility for one of the Parishes would enable me to develop ideas that would create the identity of the new team, and it enabled my enterprising enthusiasm to seek new projects and initiatives.
- I would be licensed in June 1981, and Team Vicars would be licensed for 5 years to each of 3 churches / areas: St. Michael in the City, St Brides, and St Stephen’s Grove Street, which would absorb the parish of St Nathaniel’s
- The name of the new parish would be St Luke in the City, and my institution and licensing would take place in the shell of St

Luke's church at the end of Bold Street

- From a governance position there would be one legal entity : The Parish of St Luke in the City, with its own Rector and Parish Church Council, and Parish Church Wardens. The new Team would consist of 3 districts, each with its own District Church Council (DCC) and District Church Wardens. Each team church maintained their own church accounts. It meant that each Team Vicar and DCC were responsible for setting the mission and ministry strategies for their own areas thus leaving the Team Rector to develop strategies and initiatives for the wider benefit of the whole parish

As Rector I analysed that the new parish consisted of major institutions: 3 hospitals, 2 universities, several secondary and primary schools, and commercial and professional premises that served as regional hubs, and that the parish had four small inner city neighbourhoods: China town, Canning, Bull Ring and Crown Street. The Bull Ring was 90% Roman Catholic and was not effectively within range of the three Anglican churches; St Michael in the City was in the heart of China Town, St Brides in Canning and St Stephen's in Crown Street. The ministry and mission responsibility for these residential areas clearly rested on the three respective Team Vicars- Andrew Scaife, Bob Dickinson, and Douglas McKittrick, which released me to explore broader mission opportunities

The Induction service took place at the 'bombed out' St Luke's Church at the end of Bold Street. I'd met Fred Gardner of the City Council who had overseen the landscaping of St. George's and now he was the manager of the City Centre; he welcomed the suggestion that the June Licensing would take place in St Luke's Church – and he offered to prepare the inside landscaping and seating for the summer evening event.

The Service on 13th June 1981 was held on a glorious summer's evening and captured both the solemnity and informality of the occasion. We had contacted Canon Basil Naylor from the Cathedral who devised a simple idea to symbolise the formation of the new parish, which took the form of a substantial maypole to which was attached four lengths of coloured material, representing the four joining small parishes. At the start, a person stood with an outstretched strand at four corners around the pole but then began to 'dance' around the pole so that the four strands of cloth became bounded together around the pole. It was a powerful symbol of how the four different parishes would be bonded together to form the new Team Parish.

I want to comment now on how my role as Team Rector unfolded. I had to learn that as Team Rector I was not pastorally responsible for the congregations in the three churches that had their own Team Vicar. Whereas Bob at St Brides and Andrew at St Michael's were already installed, Douglas arrived several months after my start, and insisted on Anglo-Catholic independency from the start at St Stephen's. I was soon involved in a 'spat' with Douglas over my involvement liturgically at St Stephen's, as he declared that it was in his authority to decide! It so happened that Keith Sinclair a young solicitor and a theological student at Cranmer Hall was undertaking a month's placement in this new parish. (Keith retired as Bishop of Birkenhead in March 2021). I asked him to read up canon law on the subject since my appeal for jurisdiction from Archdeacon Spiers shed no light on the issue of the Team Rector's authority. Keith's extensive research simply concluded that the Team Rector is 'first among equals', and so Douglas' view prevailed.

I found the lack of pastoral contact with a congregation which was a feature of being Team Rector distanced myself somewhat from the Parish ministry I had enjoyed hitherto, and so I contemplated some events that I too could initiate. The first, with the support of Bob and some of his St Brides congregation, was an open-air midnight Christmas Communion at St Luke's Bold Street on Christmas Eve. Bob and I robed, and we brought a picnic table to set up a simple altar with cross and candles.

We also lit candles on the steps behind and stood in a row; without any amplified sound, we simply celebrated together a simple communion service. We attracted just a few younger people on their way home from the city pubs and clubs. We persisted with this service each year until Bob left on his appointment in 1985 as Chaplain to the Liverpool Polytechnic. This initiative was part of my dream to establish simple services at St Luke's, as I had obtained permission from the City Council to hold up to 6 services a year in this famous City landmark church. My aspirations were frustrated by the lack of funds to secure insurance and the costs of refurbishing the small room at the base of the tower.

EMERGING CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FACING ME AS TEAM RECTOR

1. Building closer links with the Police

The new rectory in Mount Street was not ready to be occupied until August, and moving to it was momentous on 2 accounts. Firstly, there was the amazing set of Mount Street neighbours : Joe Baker a dentist who was the dental officer at the same RAF Sick Quarters as me in late 1950s - Professor David King who lead the Inorganic Chemistry Faculty at Liverpool University .His wife Jayne was a radical lawyer heavily involved in the newly formed L8 Defence Committee that organised a protest march against Chief Constable Ken Oxford who had introduced tough policing protocols. David King went to be Rutherford Professor at Cambridge University, was elevated to the House of Lords, and became chief scientific advisor to the Blair/Brown Governments . Adrien Henri was a well-known Liverpool artist and poet. The Shields ran a city centre restaurant and a Solicitors' practice. These new neighbours welcomed Val and me to the street, and during the warm summer nights when the day time street car parkers had returned home, we sat on the steps chewing the cud over a glass of red wine - a massive contrast to our Everton neighbours!

The other reason that the move was momentous was because of the civil unrest that surrounded us. We were not able to predict that major acts of civil disobedience, inner city riots were to erupt in Brixton, Toxteth and Bristol in the first few days of June, and again in July. These had a devastating impact on Liverpool but especially in the Toxteth area of this new parish. There had been growing tension between young black people (but not exclusively so) and the police, who had developed a very tough policy in community policing. It is worth noting my involvement with both EUTP and also the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission (ECUM) whose formation was first mooted on a rail journey from Liverpool to London after an editorial meeting of the Industrial Areas Correspondence Board in Anfield Road Vicarage. This led to ECUM commissioning a research project to investigate the causes of the Riots later, which concluded that as well as very high levels of unemployment, poor housing, high crime, all contributed to inner city communities experiencing a pervading sense of hopelessness and low community morale; turbulent relationships with the police added to the community unease that these inner city communities felt, creating tension and anxiety; harsh police tactics alienated both black and white youths in both inner city and outer city estates. Mandy was 17 at the time and had started going into Liverpool's city centre for leisure activity especially at the weekends, and she was able to witness that the police were often quite harsh and heavy-handed in the way they treated young people.

This powder keg was almost ready to ignite should a conflictual episode in the community should arise. In Toxteth that igniting moment came when a young person was killed in a vehicle collision with the police chasing some young black motor cycle riders who had been taunting the police. When the riots accelerated, many young white people from the outer city estates joined the ranks of those actively and violently protesting against the police.

There was another factor only applicable to the Liverpool situation: In 1921 there had been a police strike to which the City's Watch Committee acted harshly. The striking policemen were all sacked and replaced with former Army Guardsmen chosen for their strong military discipline culture, which gained strength so that the Liverpool Police Force had espoused harsh and unremitting tough values and attitudes towards all aspects of lawlessness in the inner city communities which had persisted into the 1980s.

Allan James who has become a key worker with the N55 Group at St Marys Grassendale joined the Merseyside Police in 1981; when I had a chat with him about his perspective on the 1981 situation in L8, he explained that as Granby Street was a cul de sac it meant that young black people could congregate there, harangue the police and disperse easily when chased. Opening up Granby enabled the police to control groups gathering there and disperse them more easily and thereby reduce tensions in the community.

From about July to February some 2000 police were drafted in to Liverpool to restore law and order, and the friendly demeanour of these incomers contrasted to the engrained toughness of their Liverpool colleagues. It was a tough 'baptism' to this new work, because a special police HQ for Toxteth was established in Hope Street, just around the corner, and at about 4pm each day 2000 additional policemen arrived, often with their coaches dropping the policemen by our new home, which gave us a sense of security but a sense of dismay as to what the consequences of this civil unrest, especially in L8, would mean for Liverpool as a whole. The extra police task force lasted for months in the face of the community tension that persisted after the intense June/July 1981 period. Ambulance and fire engine sirens continued to ring out

frequently, causing me considerable personal anxiety and concern. Life continued but there was always a sense of unease in the community for several months afterwards.

2. Developing St Brides building

In our regular team meetings, I voiced my view that St Brides building had potential to become the parish hub if its considerable space could be sub divided. Bob explained the difficulties he'd faced when he'd set up a funding scheme under the recently introduced Community Programme initiative for the deployment of unemployed adults as opposed to the Manpower Services Commission initiative for teenagers to decorate St Brides Church. Sadly, the scheme was wound down and St Brides was left half decorated.

I offered Bob to explore new funding opportunities under the Community Programme, and after wider consultation in the Deanery, especially with Revs Colin Oxenforth at St Margarets and Ray Hutchinson at St Dunstan's, as well within the Team it was agreed that a Secretarial Centre based at St Brides would serve this wider community well. In my initial explorations I was directed to Ms Patricia Williams the local link officer for Community Programme Schemes. She provided excellent and clear advice on what new protocols had to be followed: a properly appointed set of trustees, which had to include professionally qualified accountancy and legal persons, with its own separate accounts.

I was fortunate in securing the appointment of the Midland Bank Manager Jim Coulter and his Solicitor friend, John Reed plus several PCC members to form the Management Committee. I needed to raise funds for set up costs and after approaching Bishop David was directed to approach the Tudor Trust. Representatives met with me, approved the idea and sent me £20k. We negotiated with the Diocesan Advisory Committee and St Brides DCC to build two 'office pods' under the gallery space in St Brides, improve the toilets and create a small kitchen, again in the space beneath the gallery at the rear of the church. An archi-

tect was appointed who came up with a simple scheme: by using some of the church pews to make 8ftx4ft frames in which thickened glass panels could be enclosed, pods could be created under the galleries on each side of the nave. We decided to set up St Luke's Liverpool Ltd, a charity to manage the initiative with me as Chair. These facilities would improve facilities for St Brides congregation which were welcomed. We achieved these alterations at a cost of £15K. The Community Programme scheme consisted of an Office Manager, four office trainees, 2 part-time job share caretakers. The scheme was set up in 1982 and quickly established some proficiency in the community to such an extent that we were under pressure to extend.

I approached Ted Morton, a recently retired and talented ship's carpenter who was District Church Warden at St Michael's. He agreed with his joiner friend Jimmy to enclose the entire space of both sides and rear of the church for the remaining £5k. It was a magnificent gesture and meant that we created 6 more office pods of different dimensions, and the enclosed rear area gave St Brides a warmer and smaller enclosed worship area where the small rear baptistry could be the sanctuary. Ted made a new communion table on wheels, a new portable font, and portable screens to isolate the sanctuary and allow the worship area to function as a dual use social area. Ted had enabled us to develop St Brides resources for much wider use. The funding package was unique as we were able to offer charities to rent space at an economic rent, while the Secretarial services were offered free of charge to users by the Community Programme. By the time the Community Programme funding ended, we had become self-sufficient, which was quite an achievement. Within a few years several charities were established at St Brides: The Evangelical Urban Project under Jim Hart, the Diocesan GUML project (Group for Urban Ministry and Leadership), The Red Cross Library and the C of E Urban Fund .

This increased use and subsequent financial contributions to St Brides, who delegated the management of the building to St Luke's PCC and St Luke Liverpool Ltd enabled a successful bid to repair the roof, install a heating system and lighting, and redecorate St Brides involving £250k in grants

3. Procuring a 53 seater coach for Parish and Community use

My considerable experience of organising parish holidays in St George's was imported to St Luke's. The parish holiday to Paignton with over 100 participants meant that I had to hire two coaches to transport the party at a cost of £2k. This opened up the possibility of a new initiative. The weather at Paignton was so good that one bus was not used at all during the week, as many chose to enjoy the local facilities. On my return I explored the potential of acquiring a 53 seater coach, registered with the Liverpool Community Transport Scheme, where it could be maintained and garaged at minimal cost, and which could be driven by drivers with basic driving licences.

I decided to proceed. We raised funds to procure, tax and insure a used 53 seater which, once acquired, the Bishop of Warrington 'blessed' and we filled the bus with parishioners and took him home. Andrew and I soon mastered the skill of driving the parish coach, and taking it on many different social occasions over the next few years. It helped to develop cohesion between the three parish congregations. Later, we were able to appoint our own volunteer, ex Liverpool Bus Transport shunter driver Stan Moss to undertake most of the driving. Before Stan's involvement I had several "amusing" experiences driving the parish coach which are worthy of mention.

- During one St Luke's Festival, I organised a cheese and wine visit to Moelfamau in North Wales which attracted support from the staff of the Women's Hospital. The intention was to climb the Mount, indulge in cheese and wine and descend to

relocate in the pub at Loggerheads; the group was so rowdy we were kicked out!

- On a Parish holiday to Paignton, I organised for the party to have a Devoncream tea on August Bank holiday Monday scheduled for 2pm. I decided to take the scenic route over Dartmoor, only to encounter a narrow bridge which meant we couldn't proceed; there was no alternative but to do a two hour long detour before arriving at the Devon cream tea shop two hours late to be met by a justifiably highly irate owner who'd lost a lot of valuable business keeping the cafe free for our reservation (there were no mobile phones to warn him of our late arrival of course)
- On a journey to a Scotland holiday, I encountered a narrow country road that meant we had to reverse over it to make headway
- In Conwy with a pensioners' group I got the bus jammed in the narrow roads which meant that I could only proceed by allowing the wing mirror to snap off. I think a few had waterworks calamities!
- On a holiday to the Isle of Wight and a trip to the Needles, being ever too willing to please some of my gang I dropped about 15 at a beach tea shop 5 miles before the Needles, only to find that the road there was a one way only track. I had no alternative but to travel back the wrong way to pick up my gang
- I strayed from another parish holiday group in Castle Douglas to Edinburgh. I dropped off my party at 1pm and asked them to be ready for 4pm return. I couldn't find anywhere to park the bus in Edinburgh, got lost and ended up in a dingy estate with boarded up shops. I was able to buy a sausage roll and a can of coke and take a 30 min nap before needing to drive back to Edinburgh for my gang.

Inevitably, these coach outings added to my growing reputation as the mad Rector.

The parish coach was a great asset as each Team Vicar took responsibility for organizing social events to knit the various congregations together. It was also a source of income, as the Community Transport Scheme allowed other groups to use our bus and make donations to cover Stan's time and the running of our bus. It worked well and provided the Team Parish with a resource to build friendships and networks in the community. Inevitably we could only afford to buy old buses and eventually our engine failed. We were able to raise funds to replace it, but sadly we failed to drain the engine for its winter layup period and the cylinder head cracked: the bus facility folded.

On reflection, my venture into organising parish holidays, initially hiring coaches and then buying our own meant that over the years I must have organised well over 30 such holidays, involving many hundreds of people and providing a soft, unthreatening threshold for many to join the 'belonging route' to church membership and for some to embark on significant pilgrimages to profound Christian discipleship and congregational leadership

4. Hospital chaplaincy issues to be faced

I became part-time chaplain of Liverpool Maternity Hospital following the retirement of Canon Sidney Goddard. Within a few months of my appointment a young couple, John and Jean Heath, knocked on the Rectory door in Mount Street early one Sunday evening desperate for help. Their newly born son Christopher was poorly. We welcomed them in and over a cuppa listened to their concerns. I visited their son and baptised him before he died. Within a few weeks I was called to baptise another poor child who died the next day. I approached both sets of parents and asked if it would help for them to meet with me and support each other in their shared journey of grief and loss. It soon emerged that the chaplain's work would be more focused on infant mortality. In those days the medical profession simply classified any miscarriages etc before 28 weeks of the pregnancy as a non-viable foetus, which was to be simply discarded without any form of recognition or acknowledgment of

the loss. It concerned me. I approached the Matron to enquire whether this harsh boundary could be changed. She disagreed. I wasn't prepared to leave it there. I discussed the issue more widely and was soon able to assemble a small group of parents and professional workers who shared the concern which centred on these issues: the recognition that parents suffered significant loss whenever a pregnancy ended, that the 28 week boundary which the medical authorities had set needed to be challenged, and that parents experiencing such loss needed much better pastoral care. I was pleased that in that informal group that met with me were competent professional workers able to articulate the issues and gather much wider support. Within a few years, the Alder Centre was launched at Alder Hey Hospital which has meant that grieving parents and families can acquire the critical support that they need. It was also pleasing to me that as the resources of the Alder Centre developed and professionally trained counsellors were appointed Val was appointed as the counselling supervisor to that team, a position which she held for many years.

5. Openings in YWCA & YMCA - 1981 -1994

As Team Rector I was able to identify other areas/institutions within the parish that I could explore links with. The YWCA had a small residential hostel in Rodney Street, and the City of Liverpool YMCA had a 90 person residential hostel with a restaurant, and leisure responsibilities that had been supported by a city wide clientele. Both had been adversely affected by the Civic disturbances of 1981, as city centre resources all saw significant reductions in support from out of city users.

The YMCA experienced some serious economic challenges: as a City centre resource it was seriously affected by the decline in confidence and prosperity as Liverpool itself faced major political upheaval while the City Council was dominated by Militant Tendency. Merseyside was experiencing major economic decline, high unemployment, civic unrest and very hostile relationships with the Thatcher government.

I was appointed to the Management Board of the YMCA, which itself was in major transition. No longer able to recruit established professional trustees, the few that were left were elderly and wishing to retire. A new CEO, Richard Marquis was appointed and he felt that a rescue package could be achieved if the YMCA applied to become a Registered Social Land Lord with the London based Housing Corporation, who could provide much needed new financial grants that would enable it to return to greater liquidity. Soon after this change was completed I was appointed chairman of the board of management, which coincided with appointment of Bob Cook as vice chair. He was a senior executive with BT who had awarded the YMCA £90K, to be spread over three years.

Within months of the registration with the Housing Corporation they appointed a link officer who met Bob and me, and spelt out that the YMCA would need a major over haul of procedures and policies that had to be driven by the Board, which when completed would have to achieve a successful outcome for the Housing Corporation to continue funding the YM. Geoff Redhead, the CEO of the Young Persons' Housing Association would be appointed to the Board of the YMCA to oversee things on behalf of the Housing Corporation supervision. Richard Marquis had met John Slocket who lived in Preston and worked as a trouble shooter for a philanthropic Engineering Company who allowed John to join the Board to assist us.

The task ahead was formidable, but the Board approved the appointment of a small executive committee of Bob, Geoff, John and myself. The exec decided to meet fortnightly at 8am in Bob Cook's BT Office to drive this major overhaul. We were relieved and delighted to achieve Housing Corporation approval after two years. Sadly, Richard resigned to seek another post. Not long afterwards I decided to step down and Peter Hinton of the Liverpool Polytechnic became chair.

Some years later the historic YM building was sold and a brand new hostel for 70 persons was built in Leeds Street with a focus on providing accommodation for vulnerable young people.

I was a nominal vice president for several years but when Peter Toyne the Rector of the new Liverpool John Moores University moved to London I replaced him as president.

The story of the restoration and rebranding of the YMCA involved many other people to achieve this transformation, but I am proud of my small part in this story as today the City of Liverpool YMCA is a major player in providing housing and rebuilding resources for many homeless people. It provides accommodation to over 150 people of all ages and many are now accommodated off site as well as in the hostel in Leeds Street.

6. Toxteth Activity Group

The team felt it was important to relate to the newly created Toxteth Police Unit placed in Hope Street. I booked an interview with the newly appointed Chief Inspector John Smith who led this unit. He welcomed closer liaison and we set up regular meetings. Douglas McKittrick had already formed relationships with a group of young black teenagers, and Bob and I had strong links with Paddington Comprehensive School, where I was on the governing body and Bob had formed a good relationship with Philip Lodge the headmaster, and often took school assemblies there.

From this network of contacts, it was soon recognised that hostile relationships between the police and many young black people remained an issue of major concern. The meeting between the St Luke's Team and the Police identified a possible small initiative that might achieve some modest improvement. The group concluded that the YMCA has access to a 'bothy' in Snowdonia, plus a minibus and able youth leaders. It was decided that acquisition of camping equipment would fill an important gap. I phoned the Tudor Trust Officer and requested a grant. Incredibly, a cheque for £1k arrived two days later. Imagine my delight when I handed John Smith the cheque. From this the Toxteth Activities

Group was born. The project emphasises the significance of networking and collaborating with allies in an incarnational based mission strategy which is crucial especially in urban areas.

7. Parish Day School : St Saviour's Crown Street

In 1982, a low key incident in the parish's day school St Saviour's hit the international media big time as the Times headline showed 'Riot in Toxteth Primary School'.

The 1967 Plowden Report recommended that 19th Century inner city primary schools needed to be replaced. Liverpool received a grant of £1m., and built 8 new schools in the mid 1970s, of which St Saviour's Primary School was one. Governors had successfully argued for a two form entry building, which proved to be a serious mistake because the school had a greatly reduced student population. In 1982 the staff were experiencing poor student discipline and understaffing, which meant that the head had to undertake an increased role as class teacher. On an afternoon in October 1982 he was teaching the senior class in the upper floor classroom and was called to deal with an important phone call which had to be taken in his office at the other end of this large sprawling building. Before this interruption he had disciplined a black female pupil.

On returning to the distant classroom, he found a paper bin 'on fire'! He rightly consulted the advisory staff at the City Education offices immediately and an emergency meeting of the school governors was convened for the next day when it was decided to close the school a few days early before the half term; in that time, governors and senior advisers would devise a rescue plan. It meant the head was placed on leave, a temporary head was appointed, and additional temporary teaching staff were drafted in. The damning Sunday Times headline 'Riot in Toxteth Primary School' was an absolute shock to all concerned. Sadly, within the community there was a strong suspicion that there had been a leak

to the local press and quickly to the national media to highlight on-going racial tensions. Some years later EUTP's Jim Hart did an in-depth analysis to show how the liberal party's resurgence owed its success to having captured the allegiance of the pro-white working class Protestant vote in the inner city areas of Edge Hill and Everton. This was further reflected in the under-representation of white pupils from primary schools near Paddington Comprehensive which had a large black pupil membership. Many inner city white families exercised their right to enrol their children in the predominantly white outer city Comprehensive Schools.

St Saviour's School restored some stability as a new head, John Pritchard, was appointed with additional staff but only until 1990 when it was deemed surplus to requirements.

8. Release of St Saviour's School for community use

It was fortuitous that serious negotiations about the viability of St Saviour's School were beginning to take place over several months. This resulted in the school being considered surplus to requirement by the City's Education Department. The school was closed in July 1990, and as a 'voluntary controlled school' ownership reverted to the church. I was very fortunate that within four or five weeks I was able to chase legal documents around the Government's Department of Education to enable a formal sale of the building, as well as securing free of charge the release of that part of the land owned by the historic Molyneux Trust. The Diocese agreed to loan the parish £50k to secure the outright purchase from them of the buildings and land for community use. Thus ownership was transferred to the Rector and Church Wardens of St Luke in the City. I accepted this 'gift', but it came with a whole set of issues. I saw this project as a personal challenge and began to explore the options that lay ahead. I consulted several key players in the community and a development plan soon emerged.

The Clergy Team thought the Centre should be called the 'Olive Branch' but Tom McQuillan, a Senior Probation Officer, pointed out that Olive Branch gave the wrong message. He suggested that the site be simply named the Upper Parliament Neighbourhood Centre (UPNC), which I accepted. I respected his judgement, not least because he served on the board of the YMCA. Also he had registered a strong interest in securing a unit of accommodation in the new centre to establish a Probation Office in Liverpool 8, which in his judgement was urgently needed.

The complex was extensive. We agreed that it was capable of accommodating five lettable spaces: a Nursery, the Toxteth Probation Office, Charles Wootton College and two smaller units.

I was extremely fortunate in a casual meeting in the HSBC branch on Aigburth Road to speak with Frank Longworth, one of the City Council governors on the Board of St Saviour's School. I'd only met him at quarterly meetings of the governors, but realised at the chance meeting that he lived 'round the corner' from me. I arranged to meet him for coffee to discuss the proposals to develop UPNC. I asked if he would be prepared to be Treasurer of UPNC to which he agreed, not realising that it would become a major commitment for the next 10 years!!

Frank was a very remarkable man. He'd just retired from a very senior admin post with British Nuclear Fuels, had been a Labour Party Councillor in the City, and was an active governor of Calderstone's Comprehensive in South Liverpool. He was also a dedicated student of the Open University and served on the OU Council as a student representative. Throughout the time of my involvement with him at UPNC he remained an active student with OU and acquired three degrees.

His support of me, and his work as UPNC Treasurer was magnificent. I used to love to visit him and sit in his booklined study with a wee dram and discuss all manner of issues of the day and our respective journeys of faith.

Surprisingly, he enjoyed my sermons in different settings. He had a close friend Stan Maddocks who had also served as a Labour Councillor. I attempted to engage in political chat with them, but they outflanked me very frequently. I was greatly honoured to be invited to take Stan's 'humanist' funeral service, as Stan was a committed atheist. I deeply admired and respected these two committed socialists and respected the distinguished service they had both given in the community.

Frank developed a good working relationship with Ishla Thompson, the Liverpool-born black-admin manager of the Charles Wooton College which was a UPNC tenant. Ishla had the difficult job of managing the emerging Charles Wooton College. The original centre on Upper Parliament Street had become the admin centre for the College, and the College were very glad to extend to UPNC. There they quickly established excellent 'second chance' educational opportunities mainly for Liverpool-born black students who aspired for new educational and professional advancement.

Ishla and Frank became firm friends and I was an occasional eves-dropper on some of their conversations. On one occasion after Frank had gained Ishla's trust, Ishla explained that he still experienced racial tension anxieties when he went for a drink in a new pub. He always sat near the door to enable him to make a hasty retreat should the need arise. It was a powerful and significant insight that he shared. It revealed to me the ongoing difficulties which many adult Liverpool-born black adults continue to face in Liverpool.

UPNC soon established tenancies within the Centre. We opened a Nursery which enabled the adjacent Women's Hospital to close their loss making one. The hospital's promise to underwrite 15 places sadly never materialised. Frank set out to raise grants to support the fledgling Nursery for its first three years. But we never managed to develop a successful enterprise and the Nursery had to close. And so the main tenants were Charles Wooton College and the newly established Toxteth Probation Centre, together with St Stephen's Church. The original St

Stephen's had fallen into a state of disrepair, and it needed to be closed. I was committed to keeping a Christian presence in the community, and so many of the building's religious artefacts were transferred to one of the old school's two assembly halls, which was converted to a worship centre.

UPNC ran for 10 years and remarkably suffered minimal vandalism to the building or to the many cars belonging to tenant users in the adjacent car park. I sensed that as it was deemed to be seen as 'of the community', it was protected by that same community. Although the occupancy and income generated from lettings meant UPNC were breaking even, 10 years' occupation, and increasing maintenance costs of the 1970s flat roofed school, impelled me to appraise what the realistic future of UPNC might be.

The case for re-evaluating the use of the building was undertaken in 2000. Sadly, Charles Wooton College had suffered major financial issues, and was facing its own survival battle. The Probation Service was very keen to develop a permanent centre and had the means to purchase land. Fortunately, I was able to seek advice from senior staff at the Liverpool Housing Trust on this issue, and the clear advice was to sell. The earlier acquisition of the freehold ownership of the site for the parish was extremely beneficial.

I invited four firms of surveyors to bid for the sale contract, and it was awarded to Peter Kenny. He valued the sale of the original playground area to the Probation Service at £50k. This was accepted by both parties, and it enabled me to repay the Diocese so that the Parish owned the rest of the site outright. In order to raise much needed funds, expertly guided by Peter Poole, the Diocesan Surveyor, the rest of the site was sold to Braidwater, an Irish company. They built a small church on the site as part of the deal.

I established that the City Council had not placed any covenant on the land that was given to build the new building in the 1970s, and that the historic covenant on the gift of the land for the 19th Century school

was generously waived. Peter Kenny negotiated an excellent deal of £710,000 for the sale. I felt morally obliged to compensate the congregation of St Stephen's with a new small building and car park as they too had to leave UPNC, and the new small church was completed and dedicated by Bishop James Jones on Christmas Eve 2001.

9. Part-time Student: Diploma in Management : Liverpool Polytechnic 82-85

It took time for me to come to terms with the differences between being the Vicar of a single parish, as had been the case at St George's, and becoming Team Rector of St Luke in the City which removed me from direct involvement with a congregation to overseeing a team of Team Vicars and a Curate. I decided to enrol as a part-time student at the Liverpool Polytechnic's Department of Management Studies that was located around the corner from Mount Street in Mount Pleasant. The time involvement was not excessive. I opted for the module which involved Wednesday mornings and afternoons. I joined a cohort of about 20 adult students all involved in different levels of middle management jobs in Local Government and Industry. I was the old man in my late 40s. I loved it and enjoyed the stimulus, the broadening of horizons and the development of new insights and skills. The Diocese funded the modest fees, but to reduce costs I opted out of the two Residential Weekends. I was able to entice 3 other students to undertake a shared project on the workings of the Liverpool YMCA where I had become a trustee. This project gave me an opportunity to understand the challenges which the YMCA was facing after the disastrous downturn following the 1981 riots. The project helped me enormously when as Chair of the YMCA later I was challenged to make drastic changes to its management and governance which I have outlined above. My experience as a mature student also helped me understand the pressures which mature students encounter. This was to be very useful as I became involved with the Northern Ordination Course. I was disappointed that I was not able to enrol in the single year MBA course as the course fees

had risen to over £1500 which was out of reach. Later I enrolled for an M.Ed. at Liverpool University and after a good start hit issues when my main lecturer left. After suspending membership of the course, I hit more problems in moving to Hope University, and so had to settle for a Diploma in HE which was disappointing...but 'you have to move on'.

10. Northern Ordination Course 1982-89

Out of the blue, I was contacted by Canon Hugh Malinsky, Principal of the Northern Ordination Course (NOC) based at Luther King House Manchester. It was the non-residential Theological Course which trained mature students referred by the 9 dioceses of the Northern Providence for ordination. The course lasted 3 years and involved each student attending a local centre for about 27 nights each year, plus 9 residential weekends, plus a weeklong summer school. It had three centres: Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds. Hugh offered to enlist me as a part-time tutor to cover urban and practical pastoral aspects within the curriculum, and to oversee the onerous task of examining every student's 'parish audit' which had to be submitted within the first year. It was another opportunity to broaden my horizons, which I welcomed. Basically it involved me in delivering about 12 lectures each year at each of the centres: Mondays in Manchester, Wednesdays in Leeds and Thursdays in Liverpool. I was also expected to attend residential weekends and the annual summer school.

As NOC was looking for a new base in Liverpool, I was able to offer them the use of St Brides on Thursdays which was 'win/win' for both St Brides and NOC. Some Wednesdays could be busy for me: Polytechnic 9-4, then to Leeds by car for 6. In 1982 traffic on the M62 was considerably lighter and allowed me to get there on time -most of the time, anyway!

The range of experience of the students, both men and women, was massive - from tradesmen, teachers, social workers, senior managers to highly qualified professional people. My first residential weekend in

October was disturbing: in introducing myself as the rookie lecturer to a third year group, I invited them to feel free to challenge and interrupt my lectures; I immediately sensed a 'resistant silence'. In the pub afterwards, I learnt that their perceived understanding of the teaching ethos of the course was that student criticisms/comments were not always welcomed! This contrasted hugely to own experience as a rookie student at Liverpool Poly where after only 2 months of the course the 3 cohorts of about 90 students were invited to undertake a review of the course and to comment on any aspect of it. My cohort suggested that one of the lecturers should be moved from lecturing the large group of 40 plus students on Wednesday afternoons to the smaller morning cohort. The timetable change was implemented the following week. I found these contrasting contexts difficult but it didn't stop me thoroughly enjoying my time on NOC.

I was encouraged when Rev Michael Williams, Head of Pastoral Studies at Cranmer Hall was appointed Principal of NOC in 1988. Mike had been an enthusiastic supporter of EUTP in Toxteth. He introduced massive changes to the ethos of NOC so that prior learning of students was recognised and heavy student involvement in the design and delivery of the summer school was introduced. But it was time for me to leave NOC as new challenges in the Team Parish were imminent and demanded my fuller attention.

I'd like to acknowledge the patience that my NOC colleagues Michael Ainsworth, Gerald Downing and Bill Hopkinson, Jean Maitland and Principal Hugh Malinsky showed this maverick colleague. I caused them some frustrations to the extent at one staff meeting Gerald accused me of being a 'Neo Platonist' !!!

11. Meeting some fascinating ordinands

I am still in touch with some former NOC students. I was intrigued at the friendship that developed from NOC days with Stephen Green, who was the one distance learning student – based in Hong Kong. Ste-

phen was a well-qualified Oxford post-graduate who frequently came to the UK on bank business as a senior manager in HSBC. He expressed interest in ordination when Hugh Malinsky had met him whilst on a sabbatical to the Far East. He designed a distant learning course for him to pursue, one component of which was to complete a parish audit. On my weekend visits to lecture which coincided with Stephen's visits to NOC we often spent the free Saturday afternoons walking round the nearby park, chewing the cud and forming a friendship.

At about the same time, back in the parish, I had written to the General Synod Ministry Division in London offering to ordinands wanting a gap year after graduating the vacant ground floor one bedroomed flat at 164 Bedford Street (where Douglas McKittrick and Ray Bridson lived in the middle and top floor flats) as the base for a 'pastoral internship'. It was a dream package for all concerned. The incoming student could live rent free - but claim state welfare benefit to cover their living costs - experience life in Liverpool's L1 and L8, and be involved in a whole range of both church and community activities. The first student to take up this offer was Sam Wells, now Vicar of St Martin in the Fields, London. I as Rector had the main supervisory role in this relationship, and we formed a friendship which has developed over the years, in which I became a critical friend first when he went to Edinburgh Theological College and on to his curacy in Newcastle, and from there right up to the present day.

The parish had many, normally only month-long placements of theological students. These were placed under the care of the Team Vicars, although one, Michael Morris, was supervised by me, and we have remained friends until today. A native of Llanelli in West Wales, he had opted for Theological College in Salisbury. Salisbury had a reputation as a pastoral college, which contrasted with his earlier studies at Oxford and Cambridge. He was bitterly disappointed by what the College offered, and was able to negotiate extended placements in Liverpool in view of his exemptions from most of the General Ordination exam syllabus.

I had obtained a London Black Taxi to use as a private vehicle, which was ideal for Val and the family. I had a passenger seat installed in the front and retained the interior glass sliding window enabling Val and I to chat without interruption from the children in the back. I acquired a plank that went across the two rear folding seats, allowing us to accommodate at least 6 passengers in the back. Michael fell in love with this taxi and was 'gob smacked' when I rolled up in it to meet him off the train at Lime Street. We hit it off immediately, and he loved the exposure to life in inner city Liverpool.

Both Sam and Michael caught the vision on ministry in the inner city and both chose to work in urban priority parishes after their ordination.

I have gained so much from Stephen, Sam and Michael since those early encounters and remain in touch with each of them at different levels ever since

12. Bishop David's 1984 invitation to develop a new urban ministry project in the Diocese.

I had been heavily involved with Bishop David when I was appointed Project Officer for EUTP in 1974 whilst I was at St George's Everton. He invited me to continue as Team Rector of St Luke's and in addition to set up a brand new initiative in the Diocese concerned with the many, about 90, urban priority parishes in the diocese. Several introductory meetings were held. Rev Peter Goodrich of Upholland was appointed to be chair, Rev Peter Bradley was to be Secretary. Together we conferred and approached a group of clergy to form the reference group, which after several meetings agreed that the project should be called the Group for Ministry and Leadership (GUMML). This group decided there would be several components: Team Selection - Parish Audit - Units on Mission, Ministry & Team Building - Licensing

My initial task was to 'sell the vision' and recruit parish participation which I did by setting up exploratory groups in different centres around the Diocese. Parishes were invited to apply to join the scheme, but had to accept some essential basic principles: the Parish Council (PCC) had to back the process; the Vicar had to agree to be a member, but not the leader of the proposed GUMML team; the PCC had to select the team, normally about 8 plus Vicar. GUMML would appoint an Adviser for each team, who would be expected to attend and observe all sessions. GUMML then appointed Rev Barry Whitehead, who had had extensive training and experience in Industrial Mission to recruit other clergy and lay people to join his team. Rosemary Hawley, wife of the Rector of Kirkby was appointed to lead and select advisers, and a group of clergy including David Leslie, Chris Byworth, David Lewis and Julia Pierce combined to agree a set of 6 session training modules which the teams had to undertake together.

The process began with a residential weekend at which the team and their Vicar were submitted to team building/training exercises led by Barry Whitehead and a co-worker. Ray Hutchinson worked with Barry on many of these opening weekends, plus the Team's Adviser, selected from Rosemary Hawley's advisory group. At this weekend the local team was selected/not selected to proceed to an 18 month training period. The team's adviser was encouraged to attend all the training sessions so as to appraise how the various members were progressing. The Vicar had to attend all training sessions as well. The process finished with a training unit led by David Leslie's team who were given responsibility for passing/ not passing the team for commissioning by the Bishop.

I asked Rev Nick Edwards (who became GUMML Secretary after Peter Bradley) to summarise his understanding of GUMML's vision:

The GUMML process was predicated on an understanding of the local context, belonging, ownership, teamwork and problem solving as

opposed to banking formation process.

My role as secretary was to pull together all these elements into an accessible handbook for tutors, parishes, PCCs and team members which summarised them and provided a roadmap. Beginning with the roots of GUML in the Evangelical Urban Ministry Project and Faith in the City it explained the core philosophy: "What can be shared shall be shared". It outlined the process for engaging the parishes via an audit, the setting up of a team and the identification and selection of team members to work alongside the parish clergy. The manual then set out the procedures and content for the teamwork residential followed by a series of learning modules on the Bible, doing theology, the church and its history, ministry, and community.

The final sections concerned consultancy, problem solving and a process for adding to or closing-down teams. I was also further involved in the delivery of the community module which explored the possibilities for releasing the vast and liberating reservoir of local expertise, knowledge, and wisdom in the urban context. It was at once exciting and humbling to witness the impact of a release from the straight jacket of accepted - and for the most part unchallenged - understanding of ministry and the church and saw the emergence of lay people as a force in their own right.

On reflection, the GUML package was considerable: there was a GUML Council chaired by Peter Goodrich; the Training Teams, probably involving in all about 20 clergy and lay leaders, and the Advisory Group involving ten plus advisers.

I attended and reported to the Council, Peter Goodrich and I met with Bishop David at least twice times a year, and I attended the Advisory Group normally held at Kirkby Rectory with Rosemary Hawley.

Over 20 parishes applied for teams to be appointed. Just one or two teams folded when the Vicar chose to move to a new parish and their successor was not supportive of the GUML process.

The GUML initiative created a real buzz around the Diocese to the extent that the non-urban parishes clamoured for their own team training project, which followed when the General Synod set up the Regional Training Initiatives which the Diocese joined.

GUML did open up for a short-time the possibility of creating a new strand of ordination: Local Ordained Ministry. This opened the way for some of the GUML parishes to nominate GUML team members for selection as Local ordained ministers. After training they would be ordained as priests BUT their ministries were to be confined to their own local areas. About ten were ordained; some hit problems, but more than 6 persisted and offered very distinctive ministries in their own areas. One, Debbie from St Cyprian's, moved South, was appointed to an incumbency and is now a Team Rector

I have one or two very vivid memories of highlights from my GUML experience. The GUML team at St Anne Warrington included two women Pam and Mavis. They became heavily involved in their local council house estate, especially when a boy died of a drug overdose and his mother started a fund raising initiative to resource a campaign to raise critical awareness within the community of the dangers of drug abuse among young people. The mother started a car boot sale held in the grounds of the local youth centre but held on a Sunday morning at the same time as the Parish Eucharist. They decided they should support the car boot sale.

Shortly after that GUML decided to hold a celebratory Eucharist in the Cathedral presided over by Bishop David. About 100 or so gathered, sat in a huge circle around the Nave Altar. Bishop David invited members to share their experiences of GUML life. Mavis offered her reflection on the challenge/turmoil she faced in deciding to attend the car boot sale rather than the Parish Eucharist and made the profound statement: the God we found in the community's concern over drug abuse was TOO BIG to get through the door of the Parish Church!!

Several teams developed significant pastoral initiatives as team members were able to demonstrate new confidence. At St George's Everton, Jean Brennan and Thelma Harrington got heavily involved in a visiting scheme to elderly people that persisted for well over 20 years as well as organising regular services in local residential homes. Joyce Clark and David Stratford were encouraged to work in the parish community of St Michael's Ditton where Rev Dr David Leslie became Vicar. As a post script I approached him to reflect on his perspective, since he had played a significant role in shaping the educational design of GUML. He writes:

My involvement with GUML goes back to the end of my time as Team Vicar of St. Chad Kirkby. I left there to be Team Rector of Ditton in December 1984. I remember meeting with you and Barry Whitehead at Chris Byworth's rectory in Fazakerley. At the time I found it hard to manage the tension between a top-down transference of teaching with a bottom-up approach. It was about this time that David Hutton encouraged me to work with John Hull and that - plus much encouragement from you to work for an M.Ed degree - pushed me headlong into a lot of interesting material - adult education theories, developmental psychology and critical thinking.

Before David Sheppard invited me to construct a training course for the Liverpool Ordained Local Ministry Scheme (OLM), I gained some experience working as a tutor on the Community Module for GUML. In addition to seeing how teams worked in other parishes I became a team member of our local ecumenical (Anglican and Methodist) GUML Team in Ditton. I still recall a meeting with you at the Parish Club in Ditton which inspired the setting up of that team. The Ditton Team worked remarkably well and seemed to be held as a good example of team work within the diocese for quite some time. This was also the time when I began to understand how precarious teams were in terms of parish structures and, in particular I became aware of issues of power and control - mostly identified with incumbents and the transition from one

incumbent to the next. I owe much to Barry Whitehead's work on this.

In 1995 I had completed my M.Ed. and by this time I had become preoccupied in constructing the OLM Training Course. Although OLM was to skew the fundamentally important work of ministry teams when it was regarded by some as a short cut to priesthood, some diocesan schemes (including Liverpool) were able to incorporate transformative educational methods into their training package. I regard the Liverpool OLM response to the validation questions as a really good summary of collaborative ministerial training. The Liverpool Course survived for a decade before the takeover by Regional Training Partnerships. It was an exciting time for me and gave me the opportunity to complete a Ph.D. in 2001 about how OLM/GUML students were changed by a transformative educational method.

By the time I went as part-time Vicar of Croxteth Park and Assistant Director of Lifelong Learning (2003 - 2008) it seemed that the tide had turned and that a more conventional educational process had regained ascendancy. Perhaps the radical insights of team work were never truly grasped?

13. Parish life and staff changes

As Team Vicar contracts were for 5 year terms, 1986 marked the time when both Andrew and Bob decided to move on.

I must acknowledge my respect and admiration for both of these fine colleagues who had been with me in setting up the new parish.

In 1983, Andrew married Pat who had a young family of three teenage children and had moved from Whaley Bridge in the Peak District to Liverpool's China Town. It was a very courageous but challenging move for them all. St Michael's vicarage was not ideally suited to a young family, and the small inner city community was beginning to develop turbulence from an emerging disruptive group of teenagers. These were

becoming increasingly involved in car thefts and unruly behaviour, and so it seemed appropriate that Andrew sought a new living in a more settled community which he found at St Andrew's Litherland.

Bob's living quarters in a small flat in Bedford Walk also provided a challenge as Bob too had married Joy who he had first met in Birmingham and came to Liverpool with her two daughters. Bob applied to be chaplain to the Liverpool Polytechnic and was able to move a large vicarage in Mossley Hill.

In 1989, Douglas McKitterick decided to leave and was appointed to the living of St Agnes, Sefton Park, another church in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. St Stephen's Church building was becoming seriously dilapidated with the roof leaking in many different places, but to the credit of the small congregation, they remained faithful.

Andrew was succeeded at St Michael's by Colin Marsh who was a curate in the large Kirkby Team, and Bob was replaced by Sister Janet Rourke, whose husband Captain Ronnie Rourke had been on the staff of St Michael Huyton. After he died of a heart attack, Janet sought to return to stipendiary ministry with her two sons. She was able to reside in 31 Mount Street as Val's deteriorating health with the onset of severe rheumatoid arthritis meant that the 4 floor town house in Mount Street was no longer suitable for us. The Diocese sanctioned me to locate a four bedroomed house as a new Rectory. I identified 30 suitable properties in South Liverpool and did a rapid round of inspections: 445 Aigburth Road L19 became the ideal house for us to move into. In appointing Janet I undertook to cover her twice monthly Eucharists at St Brides, but only in a supportive role. When she retired in 1994, Simon Starkey, an old friend from St George's Everton 456 group was appointed as her replacement. This released me from regular ministry at St Brides, and coincided with the completion of my time as Director of GUML. This allowed me to return to being pastorally in charge of St Michael in the City.

Since Colin Marsh's leaving to prepare for ministry with USPG in Zambia, the Team had covered the Sunday Services at St Michael's alongside Stan Michael, the treasurer and sole member of the choir. He was a deeply committed and trusted lay leader, helped by him being a long serving officer in the RAF Air Squadron.

When I returned to this new role at St Michael's, it was obvious to me that he had become the person who the congregation turned to as their Vicar. I saw no reason to disturb or challenge this. I quickly endorsed this relationship. He was a good administrator, and I encouraged him to develop his skills as a worship leader and occasional preacher. I needed time to build trust with this very unusual congregation and I 'won my spurs' as the ideas person.

The first idea was to undertake a building project to extend the small hall adjacent to the church by doubling its size, and adding a ladies' toilet, create a kitchen and a small committee room. This innovation was well received,

Following the abortive Diocesan Commission which had recommended that St Michael's be closed, it was imperative that this Anglo-Chinese congregation developed a stronger link with its local community. As Rector and Chair of the Church Council, I pressed members to develop such links. I took the initiative of reducing the weekly 10am Wednesday Holy Communion (attended by only a handful of elderly communicants who travelled in for the service) to a monthly one. Despite my pressing the need for local involvement, over three months there was no response from the Church Council until after the 4th Council had ended; that is when Lin Riley asked for a moment's chat, and announced "we're starting a monthly Wednesday Lunch Club next month"!

I had to learn the Chinese way: all had been decided behind closed doors on the grapevine amongst themselves. The first was attended by 16 and from the following month there were regularly 25: all sorted! I was on a unique learning curve with much to follow: the Anglo-Chi-

nese community needed to be understood! There were some amazing stories. Lin Riley's brother in law, Chan, had arrived from a boat from China, jumped ship and approached a Chinese Laundry Owner in Liverpool China town. He offered to work for a bowl of rice each day instead of wages. He became a restaurateur in Liverpool's China town. He later moved to Newcastle and set up a very successful company making Chinese cooking sauces, and was decorated with an MBE in the 1990s.

Lin Riley was prominent in the Liverpool Anglo-Chinese Association that held regular informal and formal social occasions. The Church of St Michael in the City was a significant gathering point for this community, especially the Christmas Carol Service always held on the Sunday evening before Christmas. The Church would be packed, and afterwards members of the Association would go to a local Chinese Restaurant for a Chinese Banquet.

After a few years back at St Michael's I was invited to attend. It was fascinating. The meal was built around tables of ten, and in the middle of the tables were set bottles of whisky, vodka, and gin rather than wine. The meal was sumptuous. At the end of the meal, someone poured me a tumbler of neat whiskey, to which I foolishly succumbed, very conscious not to offend his generosity. I paid a high price for this: someone offered me a lift home, and as I was getting out of the car, I was violently sick. My chauffeur, who was the least discrete member of the congregation, delighted in commenting far and wide over the coming weeks "The Rector was canned at the Chinese Banquet!" I refused invitations in future years!

The existence of the Anglo-Chinese Association meant that there was a significant group of people who supported social events at church, but never became regulars. I was fortunate in persuading Harold Sang to become Church Warden. We became strong friends and I trusted his judgement.

Keen to develop stronger links with some of the men in the Association, I suggested to him that a cribbage night once a month might be a useful starting link. About 10 men initially responded. They had all spent years in the merchant navy and had spent hundreds of hours playing cribbage at sea.

Unfortunately, as we met there was a small group of delinquent lads in the district who had become adept car thieves. They loved nothing better than attracting the attention of the police by racing the stolen cars around the neighbourhood. Parked cars at church were easy targets for these lads. It meant that the Church had to employ a car park minder, which meant that the cribbage players had to pay him on the night they met for cribbage.

After about six months the group decided to disband and suggested that it should form a social club to include wives and friends. Harold was enthusiastic, and offered to provide a curry and rice meal as well. This social club became an important feature for me to develop, because alongside the monthly Wednesday HC and lunch club, I was able to encourage members from both groups to join the annual holiday party that I had been running. The three activities formed the bedrock of a mission strategy of mixing 'Fun with faith'.

This last period during 1995-2004 gave me enormous pleasure as I saw the congregation grow, especially among the over 60s. I could trace in several instances how new people would cross the "church threshold" by coming to the lunch club, social club, or parish holiday. Feeling that they belonged gave them the impetus, and confidence, to start regular attendance at our Sunday services.

I took a gamble with some who had not been confirmed to encourage them to fully participate in the regular Communion Services. I had a strong hunch that extending to them 'instant acceptance' was truer to their working-class culture than saying 'you can only belong after you've attended confirmation classes'. No doubt others might challenge this disregard for accepted church practice.

I had had the pleasure of meeting Rev Alan Ecclestone, a highly acclaimed author and theologian, who had been Vicar of a parish in Sheffield for many years. In retirement he visited the Northern Ordination Course weekends. Later, I visited him several times at his home in the Lakes to hear first-hand how he organised his congregation in Sheffield: he had encouraged his congregation to attend the Sunday Eucharist and Tuesday Evening congregational meeting. I adopted the model.

I started to extend the notices section in the Sunday service, which enabled me to include the congregation rather than just the PCC in critical discussions about mission and ministry within the local community. I had noticed that the annual Summer Fair was organised by a select cartel of stall holders. By using the notices spot in the service, I was able to ask all the congregation for volunteers for the next Summer Fair. By doing so, I disturbed the exclusive cartel and opened up involvement to a wider group, and by doing so extended the sense of belonging to a wider group than before.

I want now to relate two stories about two ladies, Sheila and Lesley:

The Church of England had 12 parish churches with one mile of St Luke's Bold St in 1900. But the bulk in the city centre had closed, and their geographical parish areas had been transferred to the remaining parishes. This meant that Sheila lived in the northern area of St Michael in the City. She had to cross the city centre to worship there to qualify as a church-going parent for her three daughters to attend Archbishop Blanch School. I admired her determination and her integrity, as she maintained that church membership for well over ten years until her youngest child had left the school.

Sheila had a friend Lesley who also wanted her daughter to attend Archbishop Blanch School. Her application failed, despite me giving her an 'A' reference as appropriate for the daughter of a church-going parent. I decided to attend the appeal hearing with her, because I had given a 'B' reference (as applicable to a daughter of non-churchgoing parents) to another child. Her father was a senior manager in a Housing

Association, and that child was accepted for the school. I was infuriated, and vented my wrath on behalf of Lesley's daughter. I'm glad to say that the appeal was successful. Mrs Toyne, wife of the Chancellor of John Moores University, was on the panel.

Months later at a social event in the crypt of the Metropolitan Cathedral, I sought out her husband. I was about to say "Please thank your wife for accepting Lesley's appeal", when the same Mrs T rushed over, and without a moment's breath said irately "I've been wanting to see you Mr Black!" She said of the appeal encounter "You are too passionate on behalf of your inner-city children!" and then turned away. The Toyne's son boarded at Eton - enough said!

Towards the end of my time at St Luke's, Rev Russell Jones, Vicar of the adjacent parish of St Dunstan's, Edge Hill, moved and the Diocese encouraged me to begin discussions with the PCC for them to consider joining the Team Parish of St Luke in the City. Rev Michael Fry, the Team Vicar of St Stephen's, was prepared to take on the liturgical and pastoral ministry if I would take on the Chairmanship of the PCC and management of the administration and financial affairs. St Dunstan's was formally absorbed into St Luke in the City before my retirement on 31st Dec 2004.

Prudent financial management meant I was able to leave the now extended Parish of St Luke in the City with access to considerable additional financial resources. I allocated grants to all of the Team Churches: St Brides, St Dunstan's and St Michael in the City, allowing each to improve the facilities in their buildings and still leave substantial funds in the St Luke's PCC Account for my successor.

14. Another group initiative, 1989

I had maintained a close friendship with Peter Winn who had helped me, as a pastoral volunteer in his gap year between graduating in geology at Oxford and commencing ordination training at Wycliffe Hall. On completing his curacy at the Good Shepherd West Derby he became

Vicar of St Thomas Seaforth. We met and decided to form a support group of younger clergy. We decided on a list and arrived at Tim Stratford - Bishop's Chaplain - Nick Edwards at Hale, Terry Evans at St Jude's Cantril Farm, Trevor Lathom - Terry's curate about to go to Croxteth - Nick Anderson at Ditton, and Alan Green at St Martin's Kirkby. All shared a commitment to urban ministry.

We met and agreed a catchy title: the CRAPS group! (Creative Reflection And Personal Support)! The title didn't survive long, as it was replaced by Dead Cats! prompted as a dig against our assistant bishop Michael Henshall whom we'd already nicknamed Basher Henshall. Nick Anderson and Alan Green left the group as they moved away from the Diocese. Later on Guy Elsmore, Paul Skirrow, Eddie O'Neill and Mark Coleman joined.

We settled on very simple house rules: daily office, providing our own breakfast and drinks menu, accepting responsibility for providing and cooking one lunch or evening meal per annual get together.

Retirements and promotions over the last few years have meant that the Group no longer effectively exists although Terry, Trevor and Eddie meet over lunch occasionally.

After early visits to Conwy, Llanberis and the Peak District, we settled on an annual visit to the Diocesan House at Fellfield where 10 weeks were allocated for clergy reading weeks each year. That the group remained in tact for so many years, meeting its initial purpose of reflection and support, underlies in my opinion the value of support groups for clergy in ministry.

15. Doors closing – and opening

During my tenure at St Luke's, Val's mobility was significantly reduced. Nevertheless, she managed to retain a high level of independence. After holding an 'L' plate for many years, she was determined to pass her driving test. She enrolled in a combined 'theory course' with driving lessons built in. We bought a car: she engaged in the course, and

passed first time! We had found a lovely self-catering unit in a farmhouse complex near Newbiggin. We used the place a couple of times as a family as it was amazingly well adapted for disabled users. She decided to launch out further: she hired the unit and drove her mum and auntie Vanda for a five day minibreak there. She loved her car and revelled in the independence it afforded her.

Soon afterwards, she enlisted on an M.Ed. course offered by Chester College. Sadly, the access to the teaching unit, though of recent construction, did not allow disabled wheelchair users to access it without assistance on two accounts: the steep gradient access needed the wheelchair person to be escorted, and the lift did not allow a wheelchair to access it without the assistance of an accompanying guide. I was happy to drive and escort her to the lectures, as it gave me opportunity to have frequent catchup coffee chats with the chaplain Rev Simon Starkey, an old member of the Everton 456 Group, who later joined the Parish staff as Team Vicar at St Brides at about the time that Val gained her M.Ed..

After almost 10 years at St Luke in the City, I sought other appointments. Although I had previously been offered two international assignments, I decided to stay and see through the closure of St Stephen's, as well as fight the proposed closure of St Michael's.

The Diocese planned to develop a more integrated approach to lay training and created a Diocesan Training Office post for which I applied but was unsuccessful. David Sheppard reported the outcome of the application succinctly- "Sorry Neville, two alpha class applicants but we've offered it to the other one!". I was deeply disappointed.

I then applied to be Chief Secretary of Church Army, but the appointment process was seriously flawed in that the successful in-house applicant had interviewed all external candidates without declaring his candidacy!

I also applied for the General Synod post of Field Officer for the Decade of Evangelism. I asked if I could remain living in Liverpool rather than London, and when the request was refused, I withdrew only to

find later that the successful candidate was allowed to live in the Midlands! My confidence was dented! Janet Rourke was also seconded to a senior position in the Church Army hierarchy and was a member of the selection panel that interviewed me for the Church Army vacancy. She was naturally unable to disclose any of the panel's comments on my interview apart from saying that the chairman, Archbishop Eames, had commented that he could think of three posts that I could be offered. No offers or approaches were made!

Sadly, one of the distinctive features of David Sheppard's time in Liverpool is that fewer than a handful of Liverpool clergy were referred by him for senior appointments and in my judgement he had a strong bias towards preferring former public schoolboys!!

These unsuccessful applications impelled me 'to review the situation' echoing Fagan's little ditty in *Oliver*. I was extremely grateful for the care and support which Barry Whitehead offered me.

He wisely counselled me to turn my aspiring vertical arrows sideways and "get on with life as it is rather than how you would like it to be", which I was able to accept. Amazingly, within the 'economy of God', two very contrasting, but very invigorating invitations came my way.

I had been involved in a new ecumenical initiative beginning to emerge in Liverpool emanating from the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) which had been operating in the USA for many years and which was founded by Saul Alinsky. It had come to be known as Broad Based Organising (BBO). Sister Mary MacAleese had been recruited by IAF to set up a BBO in Liverpool. To assist her in her recruitment task, IAF offered to fund free scholarships including travel of potential Liverpool community activists to undertake a 10 day training event in San Antonio. I joined Anthony Hawley, Rector of Kirkby, Simon Starkey, who led a church funded community project in Kirkdale, and Father Leo Stoker, the parish priest of St Patrick's in Liverpool 8.

We left Manchester on a Wednesday morning and we were accommodated at a large Presbytery in the Bronx Area of New York. We were met at the airport by a parishioner and driven to the presbytery. He told us very clearly to 'stay in the car', which he locked before running to the front door of the Presbytery to ring the bell! We could see the priest opening the inside door, and then locking it before opening the front door, at which point we were allowed to leave the car with our luggage. Once through the front door, it was locked before the inner vestibule door was unlocked. It was an unusual introduction to life in the Bronx! The parishioner explained that the priest had been mugged several times by thieves with guns at the presbytery front door recently, and had to install this elaborative but safe entry system as a result of the traumatic muggings.

Anthony, Simon and I each had a self-contained flat within the Presbytery. We were given space to explore New York and I have at least two vivid memories: visiting the Picasso/Braque exhibition, as well as seeing the Monet water lilies self-standing painting. Sadly, more painful was visiting the Slavery Museum. As I walked from display to display, stopping in front of a grotesque large photographic print of a black slave chained to a wall, I was joined by a young black mum with her two children. I listened to her comments to them about their need to understand this episode of their people's struggle in those oppressive times.

On Sunday we took a flight down to San Antonio to join the Industrial Area Foundation's training programme, meeting up with Timothy Stephens (later Bishop of Leicester) and Stephen Lowe (later Bishop of Middleton).

The training course introduced us to the philosophy and practice of Broadbased Organising (BBO). This culminated in the training group participating in an ACTION in nearby San Antonio to do with challenging the local authority to improve the drainage and sanitation/sewage of a neglected poor community

I will attempt to summarise BBO – incidentally, Barack Obama had been employed as a BBO Area Organiser in his earlier years. Alinsky developed a system of ‘community organising by building trust between allies in diverse communities, and identifying local people who had leadership potential. The key person was the local ‘organiser’ who would spend time in a community, listening out for issues of concern, and spending time with local people who had skills to gather people in ‘focus groups’. These focus groups would rank the issues of concern, and then the leaders of the focus would agree the top three issues. Further work and research would be organised by the Organiser and a strategy agreed how to resolve the issue. An action or community meeting would be organised in which the community would confront the ‘power brokers’. This gave them an opportunity to hear the issues of concern from the community, and promise or resolve to make the changes required. In this process the local people gained confidence and gained a real sense of the success that their combined activity had achieved.

In the training course that I attended, we learnt new skills of how to work creatively with local people: how to present their grievances to those in authority; and, more importantly, how to experience first-hand the achievements of successful organisation.

In London, BBO has produced a considerable assembly called London Citizens. This claims ‘to create change through an approach called “community organizing”, which builds the skills, confidence, and networks of ordinary people to effect change’. Its greatest achievement was the ‘action’ it achieved in getting the Government to introduce the living wage.

I enjoyed my training in USA and I felt I gained new skills for working in the parish community.

By considerable contrast, the second invitation came from two people who had crossed my path years earlier.

Norman Jones was a youth leader in St Saviour’s Everton who joined the Church Army and was trained as a Church Army Evangelist. He was subsequently appointed to the Everton Group of Churches. He applied for a parish post in Milford on the South Coast, and then tested his vocation to ordained ministry, going to Oak Hill College from where he was appointed curate in Ulverston in Cumbria. His Vicar was appointed as Dean of Hong Kong Cathedral and encouraged Norman to follow to Hong Kong where Norman was made Vicar of Christ Church in Hong Kong. There, he met Stephen Green who had been recently ordained as a non-stipendiary priest based at Hong Kong Cathedral following his successful completion of the MOC course where I had met him.

Norman and Stephen agreed to invite me to visit Norman’s church to undertake some lay training with members of his congregation.

My first training assignment was to run a Saturday Day Conference attended by about 20 people and I remember being impressed by a particular young Chinese couple. He was a pharmacist, but also had gained a licence to develop a manufacturing unit limited to 200 employees, whose low wages were set by the Government. The unit produced fax machines and telephone equipment for export. These manufacturing units were ‘cash cows’. Several members of the congregation had obtained licences to produce a wide range of mass-produced goods. The incentive to be get involved in this activity was to accrue assets ahead of 1997. This would be when Hong Kong would be handed over to China, and many Hong Kong people felt that would be the appropriate time to resettle to Australia or Canada to build new lives.

On the Sunday, the couple expressed appreciation of the training day and invited me to receive a gift. Norman had warned me that ‘offering gifts’ was part of the Chinese ethos and refusal would be seen as rude and offensive. I was invited to meet the wife next Saturday in the city centre, where I was taken to a concrete tower block’s 16th floor to meet Mr Soo, whose small tailoring business occupied part of that floor. I was shown a book of suit cloths, chose a ‘Huddersfield Worsted’ and

arranged to come for a fitting in two days' time. The quality was outstanding, from silk linings protected to prevent baggy knees developing to leather strips sewn into the rear hems to prevent wear. It was the best suit ever, but sadly my increasing weight later diminished its use!

The congregation was diverse and complex. Each evening or sometimes at lunch time I was invited to share meals with members of the congregation.

As a thank you to me, Norman asked an American clergy colleague to take me to China for a two day visit. We arrived on the day that the local 3i Church was having an ordination service. There were three very elderly pastors who'd been with the church through the recent difficult times, but as the controls were being lifted the church was allowed to recruit three younger pastors. Although the congregation sang in Chinese, I recognised the tunes of 'What a friend we have in Jesus' and 'The Church's One Foundation'.

We were billeted with a family in Gwangchou who had an apartment in a multi-story block, and I have some vivid memories of the visit: thousands of cyclists, road side cycle repairers, and bedframes welded onto cycles from the outlying rural areas whose riders brought their produce to sell from the roadside tied down on the frames - when they could locate an empty selling space.

All the buildings had the appearance of at least 30 years' neglect; the catholic cathedral had been used as a warehouse in different periods of oppression, and the elderly canons and staff had had to make makeshift pews for the new attenders, The YMCA building looked like a 1920s photograph. Visitors were allowed to purchase Foreign Exchange Currency (FEC) to use in FEC stores.

Finally, Norman came across for one night to join us and took four of us to the best Chinese restaurant, where the best meal for four cost £8 in total. When my American friend made his choices of food in Cantonese, the other diners rushed across to engage in energetic conversation and talked about the previous year's Tiannanmen Square massacre.

It was a mind-blowing visit altogether, and a very generous gift from Norman and Stephen. On the morning before my return flight, one of the congregation, who was the training officer for Cathay Pacific airlines, allowed me a 30 minute flying stint in the multimillion-pound flight simulator where I was able to bring my plane down to a safe landing!

On my return, I talked to the Bishop of Warrington, Michael Henshall, and he encouraged me to apply for new parish appointments within the diocese.

Val and I were deeply drawn to Melling, a small Lancashire village that was being united with its neighbour at Bickerstaff. The Vicarage was a newly-built wooden bungalow that had all the internal doors and doorways designed for wheel chair users. This was a real draw as Val was already a wheelchair user. I arranged to meet the two sets of wardens with area Dean, Canon Michael Smout, who had been a colleague in Everton.

Val and I saw the enormous potential of Melling Church to become a retreat centre, and the attraction of Neville running two contrasting churches and parishes that were 5 miles apart was very appealing. The wardens were split! - 3 were very keen for me to be appointed. But Mr Bickerstaff of Bickerstaff Parish was absolutely against my appointment, saying that I was over qualified! Unusually, the Bishop agreed that Mike Smout should call a meeting of the Bickerstaff PCC and allow me to present my case to them. I was delighted that the PCC out-voted Mr Bickerstaff.

But, in the meantime, Bishop David Sheppard had set up an Inner-City Commission to examine the appropriateness of the Victorian legacy of many large churches persisting in the inner-city areas of Liverpool.

St Luke's Team had maintained the pattern of the team going away for two days to review our joint work. At that year's review, Michael Fry had replaced Douglas McKittrick and was enjoying the newly-created warm and dry new church in UPNC. Sister Janet Rourke was continuing at St Brides, and I was overseeing St Michael in the City.

The Inner City Report was received through the post on the morning that the Team went to Conwy for our Team Review. We were devastated by its recommendations which called for several churches to be closed, including St Michael in the City, which was only built in 1960 and was small, compact and reasonably cheap to maintain.

I was furious! And I was due to meet Bishop Michael later that week to finalise the move to Melling. I decided to refuse the position and declared that I would remain to resist the commission's recommendations. I was well placed in the opposition, as I was a member of the Bishop's Council, and on The Diocesan Synod, and as one of sole freehold incumbents in the inner-city had a secure base from which to resist! The Commission's Report was rejected by the Diocesan Synod: I decided to stay in my current post, and I felt re-invigorated to remain in the inner-city.

My involvement as chair of YMCA was reaching a new stage, as it was becoming obvious that the Old Building in Renshaw Street had to be sold and a new site needed to be located. It seemed right for me to leave and allow a new chair and new board members to tackle that challenge.

As this door closed, another - surprisingly - opened. In 1992 I was asked to join the board of the Liverpool Housing Trust, the second largest Registered Social Housing Landlord (RSL) with about 5000 properties, many of which were in the parish of St Luke in the City. The Bishop of Liverpool was the President. I responded to this invitation with enthusiasm and commitment, which was welcomed, and within three years I became chair and my involvement grew, as did LHT itself.

This involvement met a need in me. The Housing Corporation was pushing for stronger ownership by boards of RSLs but this created tensions between the longstanding senior staff and board members. The City of Liverpool had a major change in its policy of housing management and wanted to achieve greater cohesion between its own Council housing and the growing RSLs.

I was asked to chair the Strategic Housing Committee, which consisted of the CEOs of the five largest RSLs and the City's own CEO of its Housing Department. The City were keen to transfer large units of its housing stock. A plan was devised whereby the city was divided into five areas and an RSL was nominated as Lead of that area. The lead RSL then negotiated partnerships with the smaller RSLs and the City transferred ownership of its units in these areas to the Lead RSL. It was an ambitious dream.

In response, LHT decided to develop a group structure and to create subordinate RSLs for certain specified areas: e.g. LHT set up 'Cobalt' to cover its housing units in Norris Green and Runcorn. Some excellent innovative projects were set up in my time as chair. LHT developed 1300 'beds' for vulnerable adults, where LHT provided the accommodation and a charitable partner provided the care for the residents. These small units, normally never larger than 15 residents, were supervised and cared for by live-in support staff.

Another much larger project involved the building of villages for the care of the elderly, which involved levels of provision: apartments/bungalows where the resident elder could live completely independently; then sheltered accommodation with a live-in warden; and finally a nursing home. These units were built side by side and there were communal facilities where residents could opt in as they wished. Considerable sums of money were needed to fund these developments.

The Housing Corporation was pressing the Boards of RSLs to exercise stronger leadership and governance. In response, I was keen to pursue aspirations to espouse a more commercial and professional culture. This aspiration was not welcomed by the long-established senior management team at LHT. Regrettably I resigned later.

I subsequently had an opportunity to stand for nomination as Chair of the House of Clergy, where I served for six years. It involved chairing the Diocesan Synod and being on Bishop's Council. By this time, Bishop David was heavily involved as a senior bishop in membership of the House of Lords and spent two thirds of his working life out of the Diocese. The management of the Diocese fell to Bishop Michael Henshall and the Diocesan Secretary, Keith Cawdron. Sadly I clashed with both!

I was in a good place as Chair of the House of Clergy to seek election to the General Synod, and so I joined the 1995-00 General Synod. It met in London twice a year and once in York. At the first meeting in London in November I joined Peter Bradley, who had been involved in Liverpool's GUML (Group for Urban Ministry & Leadership), and Paul Nener. We would take the early train to London, drop our luggage off at the hotel in Piccadilly, and then journey to Church House Westminster for the first session at 5pm. As new boys we decided to sit in the gallery - only to fall asleep and to see ourselves pictured on the front page of the Church Times!

The main business of that 95-00 Synod was liturgical revision which was of little interest to me. I did however achieve a small innovative development. I contacted other House of Clergy chairs on the Synod and was able to convene a meeting of that group at the next London meeting in February. I was successful in getting the Archbishop of Canterbury to meet us to hear concerns, and these gatherings were built into subsequent Synods.

The York Synod was held in the University of York, where all the Synod members were accommodated and it was possible to meet over meals and in the bars to build networks of interests. The highlight of the York Synod for me was the Sunday Morning Eucharist in the Minster which was magnificent.

I decided not to stand for re-election in 2000 as my own retirement scheduled for 2004 militated against it.

The highpoint of my final year was the Service at St Brides on 24th May, 2004 to mark the 40th anniversary of my ordination as a deacon. The Dead Cats team (a clergy study group – see chapter 6 below) organised the service and the Bishop of Liverpool preached. Wendy went into the gallery and sang like a lark: 'I love you Lord'.

I held farewell services in each of the four churches on different Sundays between June and September and the Bishop allowed me additional leave between Oct-Dec to prepare documentation for my successor.

16. The surprise of wider recognition.

I was both moved and delighted to receive a letter from Bishop David offering me an honorary Diocesan Canonry in recognition of my work with GUML, at the same time as Bob Metcalfe, Director of Ordinand, and Frances Briscoe, Director of Womens' Ministry. The installation took place in Liverpool Cathedral on a Saturday Afternoon and each of us was supported by friends and family. To my embarrassment and amusement, as we joined the recessionary procession some of my old friends from St George's unfolded a 20 foot roll of white lining paper written in bold red letters: 'congratulations Canon Neville'.

Again, it was completely out of the blue in 1997 that I received a formal envelope marked Private and Confidential informing me that the Queen was inviting me to accept an MBE. I had to accept formally but keep secret for a whole month. Given that Val was already fully wheelchair bound outdoors, we had to negotiate with the Palace spe-

cial arrangements for Val to attend with me. The Palace officials were extremely helpful and gave permission for me to have three guests to accompany me on the day. Brother-in-law Dr John Kennedy drove us to the Palace and parked in the Palace grounds, but was denied attending the ceremony. Val, Wendy and sister Min (John's wife) were allowed to attend with me.

Amazingly there was no ramp for wheelchair access to the area where the ceremony was to take place. Four uniformed attendants were deputed to lift Val in her wheelchair up the steps, and one footman was to be her special escort. Val, Min and Wendy were given front seats, and the Queen at the end especially encouraged the escort to wheel Val in front of the retreating group. Val wrote to the Palace escort to thank him for his assistance and they kept in touch for a year or two before he moved to other duties.

Altogether there must have been over 100 recipients, and there is a strict hierarchy of presentation. We, the civil awardees, were last, which meant we were standing in a beautiful hall surrounded by magnificent paintings. As we waited our turn, I chatted to a Mr Williams, a farmer from Anglesey.

When the moment came to be presented to the Queen, she asked about my work in Church and Community in Liverpool. I was extremely nervous and made fumbled replies!

We had decided with John that we would need to travel to London and stay in a hotel near the Palace. I contacted Stephen and Jay Green as he had been moved back to the London HQ for HSBC to ask their help. They found us a hotel and very kindly paid the bill.

I was touched when Archbishop George Carey, who had taught me at Oak Hill Theological College whilst he was a curate in Islington, congratulated me at the next session of the General Synod at York.

Inevitably it feels an enormous honour to be recognised by church and state, but I felt there were many others who deserved recognition apart from me.

17. Relationships with church authorities

I will now reflect on approx. 20 years' involvement with three Diocesan bishops – Sheppard, Jones and Bayes - and serving on senior levels of church government. My relationship with David Sheppard started with EUTP, where I would travel to meet him in London about every 6 weeks to give account of my work. This was always conducted very professionally in a two hour session.

Once, there was confusion over the time. He alleged I was wrong. The meeting didn't take place and I returned to Liverpool. Val and I and Mandy and Penny were once invited to spend a night with David and Grace for fellowship and a meal, and when they arrived in Liverpool we were invited to join a friendship/support group 'Baker's Dozen'. This met eight or nine times a year for an evening meal and a 'sit and share time' throughout their time in Liverpool, but surprisingly they left the group when they retired.

David was able to compartmentalise his life. I never felt he was able to offer warmth in his relationships. I must accept responsibility in feeling safer in that professional 'Culture' but sometimes it did sadden me, especially when I sought 'career advice' but no advice or counsel was ever given.

James Jones on the other hand sought me out at the first York Synod. He'd been a combative colleague with Jim Punton who worked for the Scripture Union's Frontier Youth Trust and also served on the EUTP Council; as such, he was a close and supportive colleague to me. James undertook Scripture Union's work with the public schools. As soon as he arrived in Liverpool, he set up coffee and chat sessions, which often went over an hour or so when he was able to confide and off-load his concerns. He came and preached at my retirement service at St Brides.

He offered me more affirmation which I appreciated. He will still engage in email chat even now. I appreciated the trust he placed in me. I strongly encouraged James to get involved with the Hillsborough Enquiry and was delighted that his involvement was so widely appreciated.

Paul Bayes arrived after my retirement, but like James he offered me two or three times a year an open agenda coffee/chat more focused on news from the coalface of the Diocese.

I recognise that such direct access to these bishops, especially to James and Paul, was a privilege, and I remain thankful for the open nature of the relationship.

Question for reflection

Having the capacity to 'look back on life's events' has enabled me to see God's hand at work, redeeming difficult moments, which at the time were painful but were restored by God's intervening grace.

What experience do you have of God's redeeming grace at work in your life?



CHAPTER SIX

Ministry in Retirement

I was extremely grateful to Mike Eastwood the Diocesan Secretary for agreeing a ten-year lease on the Rectory, and also to my friend Stephen Green. He granted the Diocese the funds to add a new ground floor extension to provide Val with a fully adapted bathroom with walk in shower, and new access ramp to the house. These new facilities greatly enhanced the quality of life for her, and together with a powered wheelchair meant she could venture from the house independently.

As a family we entered my retirement from stipendiary ministry with a spring in our step and a desire to explore ministry differently. I was quite clear my 'priestly ministry' could be expressed and explored differently and with greater freedom.

I was very grateful to Rev Bob Wilkes as Team Rector of the Mossley Hill Team, who offered me the opportunity to be involved in the early Sunday Eucharist and also the Wednesday Eucharist linked closely to a lunch club there.

FORMATION OF NETWORK 55 GROUPS

I asked Bob if I could lead a house group in June 2007 based on Rev. Sam Well's book "Power and Passion", which had been the Archbishop of Canterbury's 2007 Lent book. Sam kindly sent me seven free copies. The group went well and Pat Baker, a member of the church, was keen to develop work amongst the retired at Mossley Hill.

I conceived the title N55 to indicate the group was aimed at people over 55 years of age, since I observed that quite a few local members had been able to opt for early retirement. I devised a purpose for N55 to meet to share 3 f's: fun, faith and fending for each other. I publicised the intention and soon assembled a group which agreed to meet on the first Tuesday of each month. After a year or so, I arranged a three day 'mini-break' at Foxhill, the Chester Diocesan Retreat House in Frodsham. Other mini-breaks followed at Rydal Hall in Ambleside, and Shallowford House in Stafford. The Mossley Hill group grew to a membership of around 30, built around an attractive programme of visits together with an annual Christmas Lunch and a Fish and Chip Christmas Carols event.

Within three years of Bob leaving to become Dean of Birmingham, I transferred my Sunday duty services to St Mary Grassendale following our purchase of a bungalow in St Mary's parish and started another N55 there. Whilst I retained my links with the Mossley Hill N55, it had developed its own organising committee.

I agreed that the Grassendale group would meet in the church, which meant we had to ask the then Verger, Hazel James, to open the church for us. Though a lot younger, she was fascinated by the group and offered to be the secretary with the considerable bonus of volunteering her husband Allan as transport manager.

Allan had retired from the Liverpool Police as a Superintendent, and with the group being quite small but lacking cars for transport, Allan offered to hire an 18-seater minibus from a local children's charity.

With Hazel and Allan's help, I was able to organise 3-day mini breaks, and regular minibus outings to places of interest. Over the years we planned visits to Diocesan retreat centres in Ambleside, Frodsham in Cheshire, Whalley Abbey and further afield in Wydale Hall near Scarborough.

Our mini-break at Whalley Abbey was memorable as during the night a long-standing leak in the water system decided to break through the ceiling of the first-floor bathroom and then cascade into the disabled ground floor bathroom. I would have been completely overwhelmed, but Allan took over, and those affected by flooding in their rooms were reallocated to new rooms. There was a bonus when we received 50% discount as a disturbances allowance!!

I had great hopes of developing N55 groups in parishes throughout the diocese and made an appointment to gain the support of the recently appointed Bishop of Warrington. But in quite uncertain terms, she said she couldn't support this mission project and I was dismissed with a prayer!

I still feel sad about this rebuttal as I feel the 55 plus age group in church congregations offers a terrific opportunity for outreach. My reasoning is based on my observation of the significant change in society which followed, amongst other things, the highly attractive tax allowances for cohabiting couples. So a new pathology has been created: young people move in with each other very quickly these days; achieve house-purchase; then as children come, the young couple often have to maintain dual employment to sustain high mortgage rates; and at weekends are heavily involved in taking their children around leisure pursuits.

Grandparents are then involved in child minding for several years to save expensive nursery fees. But as the children outgrow parental care the grandparents, often still active and resourceful, are keen to link up with leisure groups like U3A and rekindle links with the local church through various groups. Just as the Mossley Hill N55 group soon

attracted 20 plus members, had this been repeated in the middle-class area parishes a significant number of N55s would have represented a significant resource.

By contrast, I observed however another significant development nationally in the establishment of Anna Chaplaincies, funded by the Bible Society. This emphasises the vulnerability and perceived neediness of elderly people, which reflects the Church's need to care, whereas the N55 initiative was focused on the empowerment of the resources of early age retirement people.

COMPASS COUNSELLING

Val had been involved, initially as student, then as counsellor and later as supervisor in COMPASS, which had been set up as an ecumenical initiative in the late 1970s. It had run an effective counsellor training programme and a programme of personal counselling since then. In 2008, I heard that COMPASS had lost its annual core funding grant from Mersey Care, which adversely affected their financial viability and they were searching for a new chair. After my considerable experience of chairing the large Liverpool Housing Trust I felt able to apply and was appointed chair.

The accommodation which COMPASS occupied with MIND at the Hope Street premises was hopelessly inadequate - the three staff were located in the basement in rather cramped conditions. Although there were counselling rooms, there were no adequate meeting rooms for board meetings. The room used for Trustee meetings didn't have enough space for even a table, and so the trustees had to use their laps to balance the papers for the meetings. I immediately sensed that some radical changes were needed, but we were not in a financial position to move quickly. After discussions with Brenda Dunn, the CEO, and her staff we settled, initially, on a 'two-year' freeze until we had a clearer overview of our long-term viability.

We were delighted to locate lovely premises in the HQ of Liverpool Council of Voluntary Services, and the move was welcomed by staff and users mainly because of its central location immediately opposite the Mersey Tunnel entrance.

After 3 years, Brenda Dunn retired and Tony Medlicott became CEO; his first major initiative was to organise a high-profile conference in Liverpool with an internationally renowned counselling guru, which raised the profile of COMPASS and the surplus aided the cash flow.

Tony and I got on well and persuaded the trustees to explore the development of new income streams. After discussions with another charity in Bootle who had a charity shop on Knowsley Road, we decided to rent two adjacent shops nearby. These aspirations were discussed at a planning day conference, where we agreed to open a drop-in cafe to be called 'Tea and Empathy' as well as a charity shop. After several years as chair, I decided to retire. Sadly, the handover wasn't successful and within 18 months the new Chair persuaded the trustees to pull out of Tea and Empathy. One of the trustees, however, Neil Callan, decided to lead the transition and this venture was registered as a new charity, Kindfulness Coffee Club (KCC), in 2015.

Michael Morris volunteered to be company secretary of the new charity and we expanded facilities at the drop-in cafe, together with the charity shop which raised funds to assist in the running of the whole venture. Living from hand to mouth, the search for contributions from grant making trusts became a major preoccupation.

My daughter Mandy became involved and quickly established a welcoming culture to an increasing number of local vulnerable adults. She quickly established, amongst other things, a walking group every Wednesday and created a good working relationship with several local charities.

One allowed KCC to use a minibus at heavily discounted rates. Other groups were formed and KCC gained an excellent reputation in the community, particularly with the disenfranchised who felt they had

been let down by statutory services. A local housing association assisted in the creation of a kitchen by supplying and fitting commercial kitchen appliances to enable KCC to develop its café further, but strict hygiene rules, staffing difficulties and insufficient footfall led, after struggling for 12 months, to the closure of the café. It was replaced with a well-being centre where people could drop in for a chat and a cuppa as they sought help with often complex health, financial, psychological and social issues.

I decided to retire as a trustee because I felt there was a conflict of interest between my involvement and Mandy's employment as Wellbeing Manager.

KCC continues to flourish as, in my understanding, a 'Kingdom venture' which gives me great pleasure. Within the last two years they have successfully applied for registration with the Charity Commission, and developed several new and occasional ventures to extend the range of services they offer to an increasing number of people. These include a Babybank to assist young mums and babies; a Gingerbread project to provide Christmas gifts especially to families where there are several children; and signposting both to specialist advice on matters like debt and general advice to asylum families.

The daily drop-in allows staff and volunteers to get alongside people battling with mental ill health; many find their way to KCC on the recommendation of friends, and increasing numbers are being referred by social workers and other health professionals, including the social prescribers attached to local doctors' surgeries. KCC continues to attract more volunteers, often from clients who originally turned to the organisation for help themselves. Recently the National Lottery agreed to fund a large part of KCC's work for 3 years, which in itself is a massive endorsement and recognition of KCC as a community resource hub in the severely deprived Linacre Ward within Sefton Local Authority.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is very reassuring to see the hand of God weaving a pattern of love and kindness with any who, whatever their beliefs, will espouse the Kingdom values of kindness and mercy to those in need

BOOTLE GRAMMAR SCHOOL OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION

2012 marked the centenary of the Bootle Grammar School Old Boys' Association. George Vernon, who was a master at the school in my time and also Secretary of the Association, encouraged me to sign up for a £2 annual subscription, which on reflection was a poor decision because it later rose to £5. Had I signed up through the one-off fee for life membership. I would have saved a fortune over the years!

I was both membership and functions secretary. I noted that another old boy, Harvey Dodgson, now living in Marlow in Bucks, had booked in to stay at the Marriott Hotel at the Pier Head overnight in order to attend the Old Boys' event. I contacted him and offered to give him a lift to Bootle Town Hall where the Centenary Dinner was being held, and also to give him a lift back.

On the return journey he commented to another Old Boy in the car that he was slightly dismayed at how Bootle had appeared to have become so run down,' to which the other person said "What do you expect? It's always been a dump!" No other conversation followed. I dropped Harvey back at the hotel and suggested that we meet again next morning for coffee.

Harvey was quite agitated. He explained that overnight he had felt a deep urge that the time had come for him to give something back to Bootle. He promised to write a briefing paper which came to me soon afterwards. It had three proposals

- To recruit some Old Boys to join five fledgling organisations needing to strengthen their management boards

- To set up a Docklands Trail within the Docks estate where there would be a heritage site to outline the history of the docks
- To offer Peel Ports to market their new quayside docking facility.

I suggested that I set up a meeting with John Flamson who had been a senior Civil Servant on Merseyside and who had managed the EEC funding regime, and with Rod Holmes who was chair of the North West Partnership. This meeting took place and they backed Harvey's ideas

Harvey approached the Old Boys' Committee who also, after holding several exploratory open meetings with members of the Old Boys' Association, decided to form a project that they named *Prospice 21*, which later became more formalised when the Docklands Trail Charity was set up.

Five Old Boys volunteered to be linked up to the identified organisations in 2014: David Bradbury to Bosco House, an addiction rehab centre; Les Ellis to Sefton Information Network Group; John Birchall to Bootle YMCA; Harvey Dodgson to Netherton Children's Centre; and Andrew Wilson to Christ Church Primary School.

With changing leadership at Bosco and the Netherton Children Centre, the link has diminished whereas the remaining three organisations still benefit from the link.

Negotiations with Peel Ports for sites for the Docklands Trail (DT) within the Dockland estate have been protracted as Peel were concerned about safety and access issues. Increasing competition for the leasing of space within the estate meant that Peel have had to reduce their commitment. Nonetheless a very attractive site at Collingwood Dock has been leased to the Docklands Trail Charity.

Les Ellis became the Development Manager of the Collingwood site. He was successful in procuring funding to purchase three 40ft containers that were placed at Collingwood in January 2019, and also to create a partnership with the National Canal & River Trust who also placed a container on the site.

That the new Everton Football Club Stadium is being built adjacent to the Collingwood site promises to be a massive boost to both the interest and footfall over the next few years.

Harvey Dodgson had developed a close working relationship with Ian Murphy of the Maritime Museum. He gave him access to the museum archives to enable Harvey to design exhibition material in each of the containers. Les negotiated a good relationship with both Everton in the Community, and Laing, the main stadium contractors. The former provided photographic material in a small area of one of the containers illustrating the plans and aspirations of the development of the new stadium, and the latter donated materials and labour to erect a new fence around the DT site. A local Everton Supporter also provided materials and labour to create a viewing platform for eager Everton supporters to observe the progress of the building of the new stadium.

DT is open to the public March to November two days a week with greatly increased footfall on Everton home match days.

At the time of writing in late 2022, I am able to reflect on the success of this project, mainly driven by the DT Founder, Harvey Dodgson, and Les Ellis, the chair of the DT Charity together with trustees of the DT. Whereas Harvey visits DT at least monthly from his home in Marlow, Les is on the site at least twice a week to drive the development forward, along with a small group of volunteers to ensure the site is maintained in good order. That this project has been driven by a group of pensioners between the ages of 70-86 reinforces my view of the considerable latent resources the 70+ brigade in British Society!

VAL, MY LIFELONG SPOUSE, FRIEND, AND PARTNER IN MISSION

I must now focus on the amazing enrichment that my late-wife Val contributed to my life and ministry. We met at a school square dance in 1953. I was rising 17, she rising 16. We soon realised that we were committed to each other and shared a strong Christian commitment.

When we went to the Keswick Convention in 1955, each felt a strong urge and call to be in full-time service to God. From this point, we began the exploration towards stipendiary ministry in the Church of England. Though very different in personality - me the accelerator, she the brake; me the brusque in your face spontaneous confronter, she the gentle, more considered reflector - we learnt how to harmonise our differences. For example, I was always struck by the way she tackled a writing project. She'd take time to ponder and then she would start to write fluently on the same piece of paper, while I was be surrounded by balls of screwed up sheets of paper around my feet, with so many false starts!

I always had her unflinching support at every stage of my professional life because we shared a vocation. Hindsight in Christian reflection is important, for it enables the tracing of the guiding hand of God in critical moments of change which opens new paths ahead.

An example is a simple decision that we took when Val started employment in the Health Service as a Clinic Clerk in Vauxhall Health Centre, when she began to cope with the onset of rheumatoid arthritis. She had a short sickness break from work and didn't qualify for sick pay, because sadly she had only paid reduced National Insurance contributions. She changed that to a full contribution and when she was retired on health grounds from that job, she qualified for Independent Living Allowance with the entitlement to earn a small level of therapeutic earnings.

As she had already qualified as a Mental Health Counsellor, she was able to develop her counselling work from home. Using a room at the Rectory, she became a highly regarded counsellor, then supervisor and tutor from her wheelchair as she lost her own mobility. She had great determination and despite losing her mobility in the mid-1990s maintained a very high of personal independence to within a few months of her death in April 2016

We loved each other to the end, shared a vocation, and loved the work to which we were called.

Questions for Reflection

My experience in working with older people (over 55) in both Network 55 groups and the Docklands Trail greatly strengthens my belief that this age group has great potential to enhance the local church's ministry and mission.

Is it time for clergy to reassess the traditional perspective of older people as passive and in need of care? If so, what steps could be taken in your local church to harness this powerful resource?

Does the reflective experience narrated in this book resonate with your journey of deepening, widening and challenging your faith?

