

Encounters on the Edge

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ChurchArmy

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Living Proof - a new way of being church?

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Christian community working for community development in a deprived area of north-east Cardiff.

George Lings investigates...

LIVING PROOF - a new way of being church?



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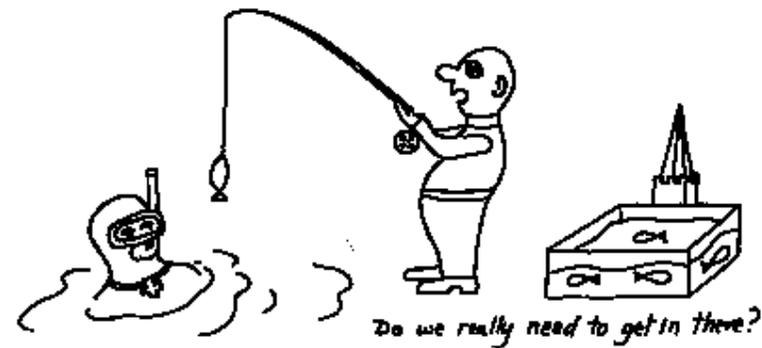
Living Proof is the name of a small Christian community working for community development in a deprived area of north east Cardiff.

Nationally significant

I lived among the community of **Living Proof** at the beginning of December 1997 and came away convinced in my own mind that this is a development of national significance precisely because it is at the intersection of a number of concerns.

- It models engagement with a community in a way that is currently too Christian for the secular world to take on without suspicion and too secular for the Church to embrace without mistrust.
- It has found ways of working with those in our society who are not only de-churched but constitute three to four generations of non-churched people and yet which is finding God at work among them, sometimes through the ministry, and often apart from the ministry, of the **Living Proof** community.
- It is a history of a small group of people who did not set out to become a church but worked in their own words "*in a community, as a community, for a community*" which is now realising that it is uncomfortably becoming a church plant for the non-churched, without initially recognising that this was what was happening.
- Its significance is not only the measure of respect with which it is treated by the secular community, or by the qualified admiration from those in wider church circles, or even the way those who have worked with it become touched with its ethos and values. It is a story of the kind of work which will become more and more necessary if today's church is to engage with the "*non-churched*" and not merely continue its mission to the "*de-churched*" - which is, in practice, the fertile sowing ground for Alpha, Willow Creek and the majority of present church plants.

Here then, in a slightly glamorous phrase, is an incarnated vision of the future. This future is located not necessarily in the particular programmes which are run, nor the personality of the leaders, but in the breadth of the gap between church and world which is being crossed by slender bridges built out of mission realism, personal cost and serious community engagement. It is, if you will, **Living Proof** that there is a need for what may be called "*post-institutional church*" and that it is already in our orbit. When a new star appeared in the heavens, people of the past were wise enough to ask "*What does this mean?*"



Making my own connections

In my own journey of understanding, **Living Proof** adds a further chapter in a growing volume which began when I was a teenager in a 1960s Youth group. On occasions we were allowed to put on youth services which, in retrospect, had the tacit assumption that by allowing the youth to let off steam once a quarter they would remain quiescent about continuing to attend church as it was.

The churches I attended and served in the nineteen seventies and eighties had sizeable enough church based youth groups (drawn from those with Christian parents or their school friends who would come) to foster the notion of this model as viable. The next disturbance for me came in 1985 when, a few months after having moved to Deal in East Kent, as a first time incumbent, our quiet small evening service was invaded by half a dozen teenagers. It was obvious that they had no cultural link with existing church and had never

been to any of our youth groups or events. Why they came over a number of weeks, I still have no idea, but my more enduring memory is that we (a supposedly mission-minded and self-styled charismatic church) had no idea what to do with them. The dis-ease of that episode remains to this day.

The next broadening of my horizons was on Sabbatical in 1992 when I visited the then effective, and now dubiously regarded, Nine O'Clock Service. In conversation with the leaders, I innocently asked the question proceeding unintentionally from my institutionalised assumptions, "What do you see as the longer term view of those who become Christians through NOS; is it your intention to integrate them with main-stream church?" The rapid reply, with commendable lack of condescension, was that my assumptions needed re-examining; for the sociological reality was that what I assumed was main stream church was in itself a highly specific sub-culture and that the aim of NOS was to be church for main-stream culture. Though not said, the implication of the comment was that it would be quite good if the rest of the Church would consider re-integrating with today's world. As a person who has consistently learned most indelibly by his mistakes, the force of that conversation has never been lost.

Now in 1997 I have met another group who are on the same journey and are being forced to find more radical answers to how to be the church in mission.

Where does Living Proof live?

Cardiff and Newport are two main centres of population along the M4 corridor in south-east Wales and **Living Proof** does most of its work in sections of these two urban areas. It was born in the north-east corner of Cardiff in 1993 out of two tragic stories.

The first is Mary. One of the founders of **Living Proof**, Gill met Mary when she was 10. She had problems at home but who or what was the cause wasn't clear. At 14 it emerged she was being abused by her mother, so she was put into care. There she learnt to take drugs. At 15 she was in a bed-sit on her own experimenting with cocaine. In counselling, Mary also revealed

she was pregnant. She was adamant that she wanted to keep the child - it would love her for who she was, its mother. At 2 months her baby was another cot death statistic.

The second is the tragic separation which grew between a growing children's and youth work that could no longer be contained within the explicit dictum of the local church – "*the young people must become like us*". The reasons for this second regretted breakdown may contain all kinds of tangles, but somewhere near the heart of it is a mission impossible. It is delusion to think of having a single effective mission to a parish which is a benefice of 35,000 people. It is yet more unrealistic to hope to reach an area which furthermore contains extremes. Some of the most attractive housing in the whole of Cardiff is in a clearly defined area around the parish church. But also the benefice contains, on the other hand, housing estates ranging from lacklustre Local Authority housing, to areas where the police only go in pairs and even members of **Living Proof** are told not to walk. When one team member was unwise enough to ignore this advice, she literally escaped from the area in a flying welter of half-bricks. Here apathy lies heavy, 25% unemployment de-motivates, high levels of single parent families struggle and income support is only too common.

Like a number of large urban parishes, the benefice of Cyncoed, Llanedeyrn and Pentwyn may look a meaningful reality on the diocesan map, but it is sociologically, geographically and missiologically a set of totally diverse tasks. Creditably, some attempt has been made to address this by the creation of worship centres in two of the Church of Wales schools on the local authority housing estates. But despite this attempt at diversity and the choice of more culturally attuned buildings, normal Sunday attendance for Anglicans across the parish is no more than 350 out of 35,000. It is estimated, even including all Sunday attendance across the ecumenical spectrum, that no more than a 1000 wish to associate themselves with existing forms of church. These figures need contrasting with the average in England where regular Anglican attenders are some 2% of the population and across all ecumenical boundaries, practising Christians are some 10% of population.

At the south west border of the Diocese of Monmouth, this part of South Wales then represents one of the most unpromising mission fields in the whole United Kingdom.



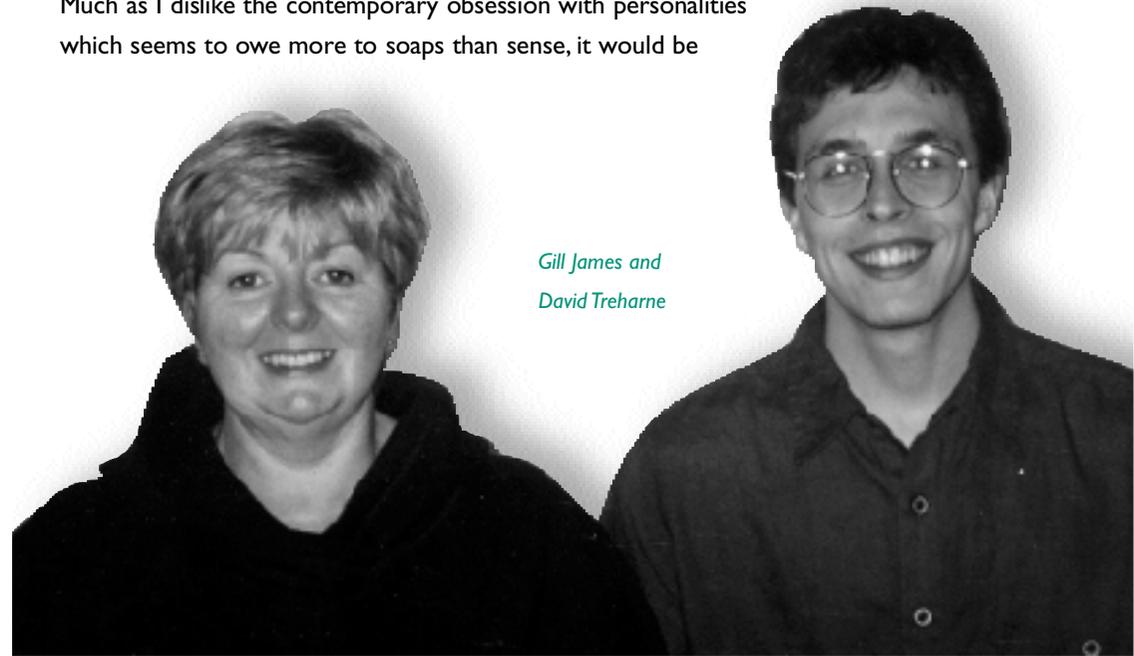
Junior Staff Graduation - 1998

Here is a story, not only of Welsh subjugation by the English, but of coal mines established for the benefit of English owners and by management who were more associated with the Church than with the workers. There is a climate of distrust of all institutions whether management, church, council, or government. There is the feeling of being in the back of beyond, of promises broken and of communities disintegrating. In addition to these factors, which could be mirrored in South or West Yorkshire or North East England, there is also a climate which some would describe as a spiritual hardness that comes after a past revival is gone, also laced liberally with the proverbial Welsh inclination for church splits and poor relationships. I first encountered this scenario in the probably apocryphal music hall joke in which a Welshman was wrecked on a desert island. He was rescued and those who came for him were astonished to find two chapels had been built. His explanation was simple. *“This is the one I go to and that is the one I don’t go to”*. The consequence of this overall history and its attitudes was picked up in a survey done a number of years ago by Living Proof members. It showed deep distrust of the institutional church and zero expectations.

Who are Living Proof?

They would say - what a good question! Its two directors are Gill James and David Treharne. They work accountable to a group of trustees including clergy, teachers, Diocesan Missioner and Secretary. The staff at present are mainly a group of 6 young graduates, often from Birmingham University which has established a continuing link with **Living Proof**. They receive food and housing in return for one to two years full-time service. But, it is also acceptable, and desirable, that local people, parents or young adults, should be part of this team. Junior Leaders who have their own training programme and areas of responsibility are local 16-17 year olds from Cardiff and Newport. But members of the various clubs at ages and stages down to five year olds can and also do feel part of **Living Proof**. It is part of the philosophy to say that any child can join at any stage of this intentional process and can develop to become a future leader, trustee or director. Like the Scouts of old, the successes of the training are recycled into the expanding programme as future leaders for yet more people. This wide and disparate community also includes those who pray and support from a distance - or past leaders. As such it is reminiscent of the loyalty and identification found among former Lee Abbey Community members.

Much as I dislike the contemporary obsession with personalities which seems to owe more to soaps than sense, it would be



Gill James and David Treharne

mistaken to underplay the key roles of the two directors. Their sense of call, the commitment to the cause and to the area, the gifts and skills they bring, are too obvious to miss.

It seems that Gill has been prepared for her present roles over 25 years. 12 were spent working in the police for their prosecution service, another 12 years working locally in the community. She has gained training in skills of community development, the importance of play and running play schemes, youth work and special needs education. Moreover, her own story is threaded through with suffering and cost - the best antidote to simplistic answers. Her enduring calling to youth work was focused in 1979, she moved to Cardiff in 1981 and has lived in Cyncoed since 1983. Here is incarnational work.

David was a leader of the early 90's youth group. Growing up too in a politically aware and astute family, after a music degree and church organist experience, he knew himself called to continue with **Living Proof** on a faith basis. His natural focus is more with adults and to see them become church in, and for, their community. Both have recently taken the Trinity Bristol Diploma in Theology and it has particularly fuelled his sharp and penetrating mind.

They are the most delightfully unexpected combination. Perhaps the married woman in her 40's and a single man half her age is the sort of surprise, in which a God who loves the upside down, takes pleasure.

What does Living Proof bring?

Let their own stated chosen values and beliefs give the ethos.

- 1 Living Proof** is proof that God is alive and well through his people by the way they speak, act and live out their lives in service for the benefit of others.
- 2 Living Proof's** mission is "to preach the Gospel and to use words if necessary" (Francis of Assisi). To meet people where they are at, see people for who they are and not what they do and to value them.
- 3 Living Proof** believes in educating the Church and the Community so that they become one entity and the Kingdom of God becomes a reality.

4 Living Proof is a community with a meaning and a community with a purpose.

5 Living Proof believes in treating every person as "Special". Every person has a story to tell and their own gifts and skills to give. **Living Proof** seeks to draw out these gifts and skills encouraging every individual to live out and use them for the benefit of others and themselves.

The theologically acute will by now have all kinds of questions and caveats buzzing through their brains, and I admit I went through that process too: Cop out to secular youth work values? Right balance between presence and proclamation? How do they see the relationship of Church and Kingdom? What of the distinction between the Church and the World? Over individualistic? Sufficiently Christocentric? Whatever happened to the Atonement? Your list might well be longer and more penetrating than mine. The questions are not unimportant, but to ask them now is to miss something vital.

Others reading their words may admire the sentiments, wonder who wrote them, or be asking the cynic's question - "what do such fine altruistic words add up to in practice?"

The most important factor, and most enduring memory, is that this is a group of people who are succeeding in living out these values amidst the social community that I've described. They make no claim to have arrived, but they are on the way. In practice they are committed to what they set for themselves.



Staff Team, the Glenwood Church Centre - Summer 1995



Summer camp for 11-13's - 1995

Their values are expressed by...

- treating each person as a special individual
- seeking to improve all parts of life - behavioural, moral, educational, social and spiritual
- giving purpose and direction to children, young people and adults, many of who are from socially and economically deprived areas and backgrounds
- using a Christian ethos to demonstrate care and concern for others
- providing relevant and stimulating programmes of activities, events and training - all of which are slowly changing the climate in which they live.

Living Proof brings provision for needs, not simply activities to act as opiates against deprivation. Young people learn to play, to share, to participate and to take responsibility. The increase in their skills and qualifications makes them more employable. The practical commitment to their own community - such as visiting and caring for the elderly begins to change their society. Exposure to the values and attitudes of Christ rubs off. By good relationships, these dynamics are caught before they are taught. To be honest, caring, involved, serving and communal, supernatural becomes natural.

Hard evidence

The approach is refreshingly holistic, yet very focused in delivery. A communal dynamic has been unlocked and there is every indication that it works.

For example, I visited three junior schools and one high school in the area and received glowing testimonials, quite unsolicited, about **Living Proof's** effectiveness and professionalism from the Head Teachers, couched in their own secular language and values. The doors are clearly wide open for **Living Proof**, on the basis of their track record with those schools, through the programmes of In Class Support and After School Clubs.

The schools in such areas are the flagships or last bastions - depending on your view - for values and community. The Social Services are totally taken



Bettws scheme - Summer 1997



Rockfield Day Trip - Summer 1997

up with crisis work and coping with extreme cases. The Police are chasing the more catchable villains. The institutional Church is peripheral and apparently powerless. The Council and the Schools know that they must look somewhere for a lead in standards and values. **Here is something being done by local people for local people and it makes a difference to local lives.**

There are many stories of children and young people who not only enjoy the programmes, but see marked changes in their own attainment. They discover their own skills, they sense they belong, they begin to feel safe and secure. They move up sets and classes, their reading improves, GCSE results having changed from predicted E grades to C and B grades.

The cascade of programmes, from year one juniors through to work with young adults, are in touch with hundreds of children and young people weekly and even thousands during the summer. I dread writing this up as a "success story" complete with large numbers to back it up, for over publicity is the last thing it needs, but I am convinced it is a significant story.

Participants also discover true community. True learning is best measured through behavioural change. Now, within **Living Proof** events, in the face of unacceptable traits, the kids and young people are often overheard to say to each other "you can't say or do that - it wouldn't be **Living Proof**". They are already discipling each other in the Christian life, though that phraseology would be unknown to them. The dynamic of this is that they are meeting people who consistently care for them, who themselves are living the Christian ethos - dynamic and community. **Living Proof** you might well say.

The lifestyle and commitment of this Christian community is partly what prompts the questions, sparks the response and leads to commitment to Christian faith.

I say partly, because the team find that God himself has often been ahead of them. Many people outside the church, when they establish relationships with those they decide to trust, will admit to past and present spiritual experiences. Of course there is a dross of paranormal, fanciful, and potentially occult. But too many have stories of events, images, messages, impressions which are classic cases of God, the ultimate missionary, at work in an adverse pioneer missionary context. I was reminded of stories from the Middle East about Muslims coming to faith.

But why should such an approach be necessary in this part of Wales?

The so called “un-churched” are not the “de-churched”

I have been a paid Minister for 22 years, I have been involved with Church Planting for 13 years. Until now I have not seen so clearly, the vast gulf which exists between the Church and significant portions of today’s society.

For years, I have acted on the belief that the gap could be closed by becoming more “relevant”. In my tradition that has meant welcoming modern language services; endorsing creativity in music and song; devising simpler, more flexible worship within a framework of liturgical instincts. Taizé, Spring Harvest, New Wine, Celtic and Orthodox dishes can now appear on the local Anglican church menu. In communication, it has meant abandoning jargon, adopting presentation, not just preaching but using drama, visual aids and dance; the process means sitting looser to cultural forms which are just church norms and seeking for Christian principles behind moral and traditional shibboleths. We have tried *Evangelism Explosion*, *Good News Down Your Street*, *Alpha* and are glad of *Emmaeus* and *Willow Creek* approaches. We have bent our head around Post-modernism. In structures, we have adopted house groups, lay leadership teams, healing ministries, ecumenical conversations and church growth thinking. Heavens, we have tried.

But all of it, it now seems to me, to have been on the assumption of accommodation. It is as though the Church has been saying, “We’ll update our

image, brighten up our paintwork and smarten up our act, but you (those we want to see encounter the living Christ) will want to come to us - won’t you?” The brutal reality is that they don’t and so won’t. Doubtless there are exceptions, but the word on the mission grapevine is that the plethora of new approaches in mission, cited above, are drawing the de-churched, not the un-churched.

What is the distinction? Is it a fine line or two significantly different mission fields? While some spectrum does exist, it may be more helpful to recognise it is the latter scenario.

Who are the de-churched?

Those I am terming the de-churched include those sometimes called the lapsed. They may have dropped out in a house move, or because of a change of vicar, or when work patterns changed. Further out on the fringes of the de-churched are many who went to Sunday school or a youth group, they were married in church, or they are among the 28% who had a child baptised. They would at least consider going to Church at Christmas and hope to survive the experience. Yet further out are the people whose parents had those kind of links and those with pressures from the extended family to seek baptism of a child. These are those who come back to faith, or who find a substance where previously there was only the shadow, through today’s forms of evangelism and pastoral care. In many cases someone in the family or friendship group has been praying for them - perhaps for years. They come back, which is what Church is asking for. But they are only a fringe around existing membership - not the majority of the population.

Who are the so called un-churched?

They are among the people I haven’t spent my life with for many years. Here there is no history of regular church attendance for three or four previous generations. There is no one living in the extended family for whom this is part of normal life. No one prays for them by name.

For them, Church is what some others do. It is noticed sadly, in their terms, not only as an alien and expensive building that I wouldn’t know what to do in, worse, it is occupied by people I wouldn’t be seen dead with. To them, Church

stands for internal bickering over issues no one else cares about, inconsistent lives that make claims in words ridiculous, led by people who don't know what they believe and are probably to be distrusted with other people's children. This view is a major group in urban society and it is frighteningly possible that we are blind in practice, and in tactics, to their existence.

Not even un-churched - but "non-churched"

While the distinction between de-churched and un-churched has been made and is used, it is perhaps better to choose language that makes the contrast yet more stark for such is the difference between them. I suggest the term the "non-churched" as "un-churched" still could easily imply that once this category of people were churched and they somehow lost that connection. This is neither true nor helpful, and it is interesting that both terms un-churched and de-churched betray a cast of mind that assumes that all people are somehow our people. I am reminded of the Episcopal reaction to the 1851 census and the reputed conversation between a Bishop and the Prime Minister.

Bishop "My Lord, we have lost the towns."

PM: "My Lord you never had them."

I'm afraid the perception of the realistic politician is still sinking into the rosy eyed ecclesiastical consciousness over 140 years later.



Not our people

I think it would be helpful to us in this major re-think of a vast mission need, to recognise that groups which are profoundly non-churched represent a cultural group, more than simply a neighbourhood. What defines them is not their address but their attitudes. All our historical associations with neighbourhood invite mission responses which are merely extensions of past patterns of working with those whom we fondly term "our people". We then invite them in a variety of way to come and join us. The social and mission reality is that this enormous sector of society are not "our people" - they haven't been in living memory, nor do they want to be. Such language is patronising and alienating. This reality is all the more significant when in the majority of cases, as here in Cardiff, the group one is talking about represents not some obscure minority group but arguably the majority of inhabitants in all our industrial cities; in the case of the Cardiff Cyncoed benefice, 80-90% of the population.

So what?

Five years ago, I came across a pithy quote from Harold Turner, a retired New Zealand missionary and now freer to be a thinker. "There is no precedent for a mission to a culture that believed it had been converted when it hadn't and then publicly discarded the Christian faith." At the time I thought it was quotable and forceful, I have now met the people where it is true. It is an unforgettable change of perception. **Yet, any apostolic church, which deriving its nature from the apostolic (or sending) character of God has no option but to face its mission to the non-churched - even at the cost of finding whole new ways of being church to exist alongside what we do and are at present.**

The task to become church for them, among them and with them, and under the spirit of God to lead them to become church in their own culture, requires a radical reworking of all language and approach. It is as wide a gap as that experienced by a cross cultural missionary such as Vincent Donovan working among the Masai, but in one sense even more radical.

David Treharne comments:

"Having now read Donovan's book, the parallels between the Masai and working

with the communities in South Wales are frightening. The hardest part is the fact they have rejected the content of Christianity by placing their own negative interpretation upon it .”

Here, it is not that words like “church” are devoid of content but that they are loaded with immense negative content. This difference is key to the whole approach. Thus it must be realised and humbly accepted that any approach at evangelism or even community involvement which smacks of bringing people back to the church, which they have decided to reject, is tactically suicidal and in the past has been seen even as a betrayal of trust. To invite the deeply non-churched to join the Church, would be as though a Speakers’ Corner atheist invited a Christian to join the society of Judas.

As George Carey put it in the Ashe Lecture of 1997

“We must be realistic; contemporary society is in significant ways hostile to traditional Christian belief and Christian values, however frequently we see God’s grace at work in those who do not acknowledge Him.”

The gap is so wide that new forms of church, at present seemingly disconnected from existing forms, will be necessary. Once again, new wineskins are being called for - not scrubbed up old ones, but new creations and shapes.

In a small but significant way **Living Proof** are offering the church some routes to follow

- They are separate enough from institutional church not to be impossibly tarnished by it.
- They live Christian values communally, while engaged in social transformation.
- They live and work locally in their social community.
- They are remodelling the older way of church as service - reminiscent of religious orders.
- They have learnt that Christ, like actions and reactions, comes before words and concepts and find, how surprising, that it works.

- They wait to see where God is at work in individuals and respond to opportunities.
- They are moulding new forms of church within the existing culture rather than taking the isolated converts out of the culture and isolating them yet more. They instinctively know mission must permeate to permeate, not rescue to re-form.

Where is Living Proof going?

They have hopes that resonate with needs.

They see scope for development, and indeed are receiving requests already, that lead them to dream of five future teams of people each with a co-ordinator.

- **An Education Team** who offer training in a wider range of NVQ’s than the existing one in play.
- **A Training Team** working with local teachers, youth workers and play scheme organisers, training yet further people in these community building skills.
- **A Social Ministry Team** working with **Church Army’s** Project in Cardiff among the young homeless.
- **A Business Team** who would concentrate on providing employment opportunities for local people to gain skills to serve as classroom assistants, run play schemes, second hand furniture businesses or providing parties for children. The economic markets are already there.
- **A Christian Community Team** who will lead the transition for **Living Proof** to become, in effect, a church plant.

Indeed because they work in areas of both Cardiff and Newport it could mean more than one plant, under a Living Proof umbrella. **Living Proof’s** own corporate life is to provide a spiritual undergirding of the other four teams. A communal refuelling in God and by God is necessary for life lived in the wider community, with God. (In traditional terms, Church might call that the dynamic cycle of Worship, leading to Mission) The Christian Community team would

also provide the pastoral care to the **Living Proof** members. In all these ways it would become more and more theologically obvious that this is a church coming into being. It is also quite obvious that the only people for whom that move is a problem are the existing churches. There are a few notable exceptions who still hope for partnership with **Living Proof** to lead to an emerging church which might be integrated, in part, with existing church.

They have difficult questions - for themselves and others

How can they find ways to break a cycle that occurs too often when working with those in need? Provision acts like putting a cover over holes into which the needy would fall yet deeper, but often fails to act as a ladder by which people can themselves climb out of the pit into which they have fallen. Their lives appear to be mended to some degree but what happens after rehabilitation? Re-offending is the wide open path. What would it be to form church among them and for them? The work of Mark Perrott in Earls Court London offers one example of a better way. Empowerment will be a significant content of the route, enabling people to take control of their own lives and the emerging church of which they are part.

How can they become “church” in a culture that rejects the very word and bitterly expects nothing from the church? What fresh vocabulary will do justice to enduring theological truths, yet resonate with deeply non-churched people? Certain strands are appearing. **Living Proof** itself is shorthand for “Showing God is alive and well and living among His people”. It is almost shorthand for “the Kingdom of God is near”. “Community” will do a lot of duty for “Congregation”. “Sorted” is dynamic equivalence for “Blessed” and so it goes on. Mercifully God and Jesus are still legal tender - though some say “only just”.

We could think of the whole process of growth into recognition of being church, being like an elliptical orbit which takes an exploratory space craft out of sight before it can possibly come back, or like the granting of freedoms to older teenagers so that they can become their own adults - rather than copies of their parents. The question is will we, the wider Church, dare? The historic church (of Latin origins) has a very mixed track record over granting such freedoms. It has been far better at throwing out the Wesleyes of this world and then patting their statues on the back 250 years later.



Should we reject this as well?

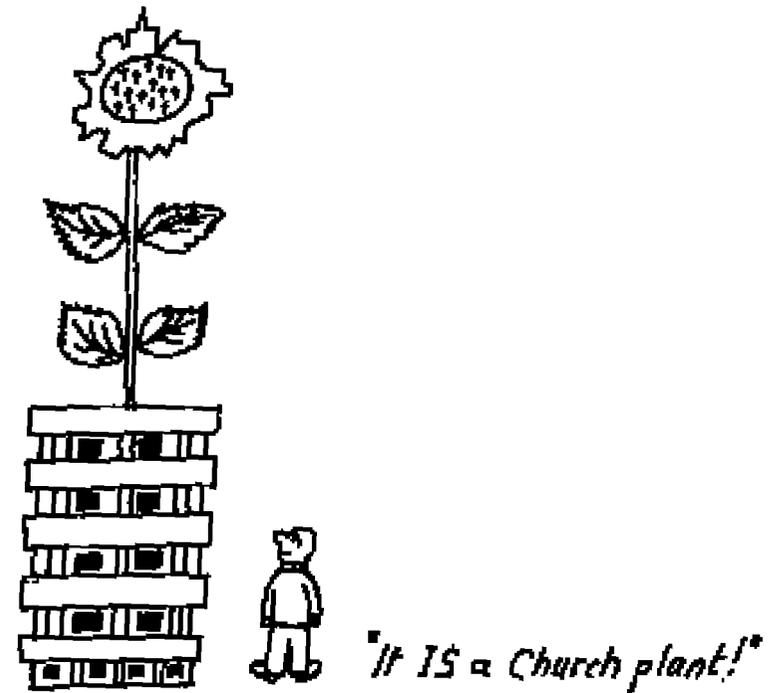
Today particularly is an understandable danger of obsession with our future identity. Yet in the face of Jesus' teaching about a willingness to die to oneself, I wonder whether a church which is so gripped with preserving its identity has not in fact already more profoundly lost it?

How can the leaders of **Living Proof** hold together two seemingly unjoinable instincts; to be Anglican and to fit culturally? This is yet more complex in that the charity is interdenominational and most students, who work as staff are not Anglicans. I see significant hope within the discipline of an Episcopal Church which already knows sector ministry and that other forms of church other than parish do, and should, exist. A wider view, than that which parishes naturally aspire to, has often been the way over the last ten years to maintain the order of the Church and yet to set free new forms of being Church.

Churches for networks not just neighbourhoods, and Church Plants to supplement parish churches are both affirmed by “*Breaking New Ground*” - the Church of England's report on Church Planting – which also contains

examples of good practice. Legal frameworks for these new ventures under the Pastoral Measure are being processed and the route of the Extra Parochial Place is the most appropriate and promising for ventures which reach to *cultures* and so complement a parochial approach to *territories*. Such responses are the children of the instinct for diversity which is so typically Anglican and which are held within the one framework of working with the Bishop. Relating closely in trust to the Bishop and sitting loose to the forms of virtually everything else could be the radical route to unroll. It is only a journey back to the 18th Century to find a Church in which the Bishop and the Parish are the two dominant landmarks and all else is peripheral. To be Episcopal and Local is deeply Anglican. Relationship and trust are ways to travel light in finding an unknown future. For we should not welcome anything - there should be some limits to acceptable diversity, or essential orthodoxy will not be guarded.

There is, in the air, the possible development of ordination to the permanent diaconate for Gill James and David Treharne. I salute the movement implied in the offer but suspect it can only be a half way house. A Christian community which is, de facto, a Church needs at least one full time leader that can offer the presidential ministries that spring from the life of that community. Not arrogantly I hope, my own view is that our present implicit doctrine of ministry and communion needs turning on its head. In a world where many priests have lost their position in society and there are so many designations of "Minister", that only an ardent church watcher can keep up with the range of acronyms (NSM, LNSM, MSE, OLM, etc), we are in danger of the confusing cart and horse. In crudest terms we must begin again at the beginning - with God, who sent Christ, who called the Church community, which recognized leaders, who serve sacraments. In such a cascade, which is also a rationale, the mission comes before the Church, and the Church comes before leadership, and leadership before sacraments. That is the logic of mission that starts in God. Here in South Wales, God has called a mission into being, it is under way, a community is being won and formed, it already has leaders - the demand for sacraments will spring out of that living life. Who is to say that this process is fundamentally misconceived?



They have practical obstacles

Money is short. The community's leaders have no salaries. They are a charity known half as well as it deserves. This brings freedom from the ties of other's purse strings but also the attrition of not knowing how the bills are going to be paid. **Living by faith consumes large amounts of faith.**

Staffing is short. If dreams of any of the five teams cited under hopes is to begin, new people will need to hear a call to South Wales, for longer periods than one or two years.

There is such potential

It is curious that an Anglican Church which can apparently make a book like Vincent Donovan's "*Christianity Rediscovered*" virtually required reading at theological college has far more difficulty in recognising very similar dynamics and challenges operating at a relatively unknown development in Wales. Nor is this the only case; there are other alternative services and youth congregations, better known through the country, who are exploring

the boundaries of what it is to be Church among those deeply alienated from its dominant existing forms of life. But as far as I know, this development - let us not patronisingly call it an experiment - has gone further down the road of holistic community engagement than any other. That deserves encouragement and praise, with courageous leadership from the episcopate to validate new forms of church, forms which will be more and more necessary in the next century. To meet that hour, the church needs now to re-train more of its full time workers in community development skills, in how to be loving committed communities, and in cross cultural mission skills. We shall need more confidence in the living, loving, mission minded community of the Trinity, to sit loose to past forms to find new ways. The answer for alienated urban communities cannot be a continued call back to Church. The call is to go out to them, to go on with them and to go forward into fresh forms of the essence of Church which embodies the lovely dynamics of the life of Christ and his Kingdom.

The first word shall be last?

I recall my opening words when meeting Gill and David and being asked of my first impressions of the literature I had read before going. The word I used was *dynamite* and it became apparent in my visit, that this word is commonly used by those who come and look at the big picture of the story of **Living Proof**. My own belief is that this dynamite should not be interpreted as a threat - something which will blow up the Church. Rather here is something which helps blow open the doors of our understanding of the depths of the mission task that faces us and could blow down the barriers that prevents the welcome acceptance of these deeply Christian responses.

With confidence in what God does, despite its unlikely clothing, I hope that the challenge of the **Living Proof** project can be embraced as Church in mission, rather than emasculated by a Church too often not in mission.

George Carey's Ashe Lecture once more:

"And it is into His hands that we can commit our futures knowing that the highways and byways He will lead us into will have many an excitement and an occasional shock, as we turn a corner to find an unexpected obstacle or mount a rise to discover a breathtaking view."

**George W. Lings, Director
The Sheffield Centre
January 1999**

Cartoons: Tim Sharp, Deal

For those who want to find out more, **Living Proof** have literature that tells their story, presents their aims, values and objectives. In addition there is now an outdated but basically sympathetic *Church Times* article from 1995 available.

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