

Encounters on the Edge

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ChurchArmy

Encounters on the Edge

A Series of Quarterly Investigations from

The Sheffield Centre

No. 2



Unit 8: Out of sight, out of nothing

June 1997 saw Unit 8 refurbished and ready to run; lino on the floor, posters on the walls, a moveable pool table, TV and video. **BUT READY FOR WHAT...?**

George Lings investigates...

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ChurchArmy

The Sheffield Centre, 50 Cavendish Street, Sheffield S3 7RZ.

Tel: 0114 272 7451 Fax: 0114 279 5863

Email: g.lings@sheffieldcentre.org.uk

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Where Wool meant Wealth



Shipley is an attractive town of some 30,000, nestling beneath Ilkley Moor, a few miles north-west of Bradford in West Yorkshire. Largely, it serves as a dormitory area to both Bradford and rapidly developing Leeds. Leeds is a boom town on its way to becoming a financial services centre for the North, even starting to be known as Little London. St Peter's on the western side of Shipley is one of four parishes in the town. Planted out from St Paul's Shipley and with a stone church built in 1909, the parish of 7000 is made up of three distinct housing areas, either side of the busy A650 Bradford to Keighley road.

■ South of the road and more significantly up the hill, is **NAB WOOD**, making up half of the parish. The homes of past mill owners, some are now serving as nursing homes and the detached and semi-detached dwellings of professional people predominate. Guess where the church was built?

■ The North East corner of the parish is the area of **SALTAIRE** - a picture post card model village, created by the Wool magnate Sir Titus Salt, complete with the 1853 Mill with its chimney disguised as a Venetian bell tower.

The 800 houses are tiered to match work promotions; the locality combining industry and beauty in the Italian style, with matching shops, station, library, hospital, school, park and architecturally striking Classical style church. It is now populated by elderly ex Mill workers (The mill shut in the 1970's.), rented accommodation and more up market first time buyers.

■ West of Saltaire is **HIRST WOOD** 500 houses which are predominantly council rented, with no community facilities, and a small industrial estate. There is one road in and out, going nowhere. It is by the railway, down the hill, out of sight and out of mind. To say that it is "forgotten" is too charitable - overlooked would be more true.

Hirst Wood is that part of the parish which is most deprived-economically and socially. But it has further disadvantages. As an area, it is just too small to attract funding. The Council classifies it together with the famous Saltaire area which attracts the visitors, tourist income, preservation society spending and council monies. The Diocesan Authorities seemed unaware of Hirst Wood; Shipley as a

whole is one of the few prosperous suburban areas of the diocese and St Peter's, with one of the largest electoral rolls at 360, has a potential-based quota to match. A recent incoming curate was informed, or warned. "It's a port drinking parish". Many of Hirst Wood's people, seen as problem families, have been moved out from Bradford onto the estate. There is little or



nothing for the kids to do, there is a lack of self esteem – some of its people are described as crushed. The residents/tenants association has some ideas, but is politically weak numerically.

Comings and Goings

For years St Peter's has had a conscience about Hirst Wood. Because of the social and geographical divide, few from Hirst Wood came up the hill to what could feel like the church of the nobs, while well intentioned forays were made down the hill.



The Missionary Foray

At various times these have included a Sunday school, a coffee bar and a March for Jesus. But all these were born out of the assumption, in the classic Anglican

Christendom model, that inviting people to come brings people to the established church and to what it already does. It is now becoming clear from anecdotal evidence around the country that the “Come” approach nearly always works among the De-churched but not for the Non-churched. (For amplification of these two terms, consult **Encounters on the Edge** 1999 No 1: on “Living Proof” pages 12-16.)

“Come” style evangelism can still work where the cultural and missiological gap between church and world is still narrow enough for someone on the world side to jump over, with a bit of a run up and a helping hand from a church friend. Such moves are usually assisted by some sense of familiarity with church among the Dechurched. There is some memory, whether from family or childhood or a helpful experience of a baptism, wedding or funeral, to draw upon. This jump is a journey back, rather than a new journey, which makes it easier to make the leap. Where there is a revitalised church on the far side, it provides an “agreeable sandy landing pit”.

The yawning and also widening chasm to the Non-churched cannot and will not be bridged by such an approach. Here it is imperative that the church itself,

humbly and sensitively crosses the gap from church to world. To make that transition the church has to travel as “light” as possible, throwing off as much of its own cultural baggage as it can. Vincent Donovan’s *Christianity Rediscovered* is still the modern mission classic in that transition. The outward journey itself evokes the words “Sent” and “Go” which missiologists would instantly recognise as more authentically Christian than Christendom’s “Come” approach.

The comings - of going to Hirst Wood

Hirst Wood's young people are all Non-churched. Even among the older adults, the local team estimate that only one third could be described as the dechurched. The Non-churched predominate. This estimate is born out by a recent survey of a sample of adults of all ages in nearby Huddersfield. It noted that 58% of those interviewed classified themselves as **never** having had contact with a church. With such a challenge, a very different approach was going to be needed.

Five years of a rising tide



In 1992 the new Vicar, Chris Edmondson (left), was appointed. Even before interview he only saw the edge of the Hirst Wood estate but thought inside himself “there’s got to be something for here”. With some previous experience of church planting as a vicar and more widely as Diocesan Missioner, it was reasonably natural for him to think more radically about future options.

1995 saw the gestation and birth of a parish vision and mission statement. This process enfolded both PCC and church membership. One element was that a church plant for Hirst Wood, or for Saltaire, was a way forward. It was linked to the desire to appoint a community youth worker for the area. In the past, youth workers had been parish-based.

1996 brought an interview process for a worker without a result, which led to a rethink and a rewritten job description. So near yet so far. However, a member of the staff, an MSE minister, Pat Gratton, moved onto the estate. In Romania (of all places) a church friend had made a throw away comment to Chris Edmondson about leasing a small property on the industrial estate

called **Unit 8**. In record time, the PCC resolved to lease it for five years and completed the deal in December 1996.



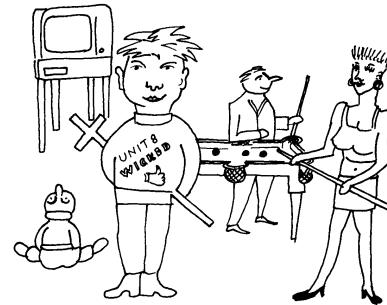
February 1997 marked the interview of Tim Sudworth. He and his wife Nicki moved in and started work in April.

By June, **Unit 8** had been refurbished by self-help teams, aided by local kids who were intrigued by what was going on, opened by the Local MP and had begun to function.

Life at Unit 8

This ground floor utilitarian building is at the end of the road, where kids come to play about. The premises consist of one room some 30x12 feet, with an office for gear, a tiny galley kitchen and one loo. Lino on the floor, posters on the walls, a moveable pool table, TV and video complete the facilities. It is simple.

While refurbishing was taking place, it seemed sense to pray once a week for the future. A few St Peter's people would come each Tuesday at quarter to seven, and then the estate kids, 7 years old and above, started coming too. Meetings could vary from the wholly disrupted to the holy surprising. Numbers of new people could be from none to fifteen. Prayers were requested, and prayers made, came from the kids as well as the workers. It became appropriate to include some input with Intercession and Ministry from the Word. Tuesday began to have something of the character of what normally happens in Sunday worship.



A sensitive approach

Still on Hirst Wood, that didn't phase the kids; they literally didn't know what Christians did on Sundays.

Wednesday used to be a club night for young people of all ages and if 30 came, the place started to heave. The leadership resolved to start another

night, specifically aimed at children below the age of 10. In order to staff this, two of the volunteers from Wednesday offered to become co-leaders co-ordinating the team for Monday nights. Further leadership help was raised from within St Peter's itself with eight volunteering. In November 1998, the younger children's night started. Concerned that young children wander around the estate at a time when they would be safer indoors, the club runs from 6:00 to 7:00pm. The atmosphere and approach is very similar to that on a Wednesday evening but there are more activities based around crafts and board games and also from time to time the use of Christian video. In both groups these become opportunities to build relationships while providing sufficient activity. The leader lets group peer power sort out the discipline challenges. Out of the relationships will come the link to the homes and families.

"As a result of splitting the age groups, we have found that overall numbers on the two nights have grown so that the total number of children and young people we are in contact with is many more."

Other community uses include an older people's club on Tuesday afternoon, a Guardian and Toddler group and a Thursday Homework Club run with the assistance of two teachers funded by a Titus Salt Foundation Trust.

Survey work shows that many of the estate have already begun to hear about **Unit 8**. As a stranger taking a child home after the Tuesday night prayer time, I was approached nervously by three older girls wondering whether I was a suspicious character. On simply saying I was part of **Unit 8**, everybody relaxed. Credibility is being established in the area.

Christmas 1998 saw a first on the estate. Stuart Gallimore, a church member, began to take an increasing pastoral leadership role at **Unit 8**. He and

others took the Cell Church idea of gathering a crowd together as an effective way of starting to build a congregation. The afternoon event was for the elderly. Existing members of **Unit 8** Tuesday club invited their friends for some Christmas celebrations.

“They enjoyed Christmas carols, a short Christmas Bible reading and a comment from Chris plus an amazing game of Bingo, the like of which you have never seen before(!), poetry readings and Christmas refreshments.”

The evening “*Christmas Extravaganza*” starred Santa Claus, food, music, carols and a quiz. It was poignant to see adult volunteer church members from St. Peter’s mingling with the young people who have come to be part of **Unit 8’s** life and ministry.

Overlaps with other similar adventures

I went to Shipley partly in order to compare **Unit 8** with the instincts and priorities of “**Living Proof**” in Cardiff and to see whether there are common marks of this kind of mission. Neither venture initially knew of the existence of the other, so no copying was operating although leaders from both projects have since met and exchanged ideas.

The similarities

- 1 Both are deliberately working among the tougher non-churched sector, rather than with the less resistant de-churched fringe.
- 2 The major contours in the work are intriguingly the same.
 - a Both have found the way into the local community **through work with children and young people**, using both schools and clubs.
 - b Both are seeking to reach a whole community using holistic aims and methods, by **building Christian community** from them and among them.
 - c To do either of these things, they have deliberately **allowed distance, even discontinuity, from traditional church** so as to be free enough to fit what works locally.

- 3 Both are finding that the first response to the initiatives is about trust being placed first in the quality of work they are doing with local people and only secondly that church is beginning to form under their feet without this outcome being the explicit intention of the incoming team.
- 4 Both see ways in which God has been there ahead of them in the lives of the people in the groups to be reached.

The differences too should be noted, but these are mainly accidental not intentional

- 1 In Shipley, there has been a sending church from the start, with which the relationship is good and from which the freedom to do church differently for a different people group is given.
- 2 The Diocese have been involved from the beginning. Once they were shown the hidden nature of this forgotten area, Diocesan Leaders became supportive. Through a relationship with a trusted incumbent, more indigenous forms of church, ministry and worship can be devised.
- 3 **Unit 8**, from St Peters, is more like an intentional cross culture church plant, while not yet knowing what the emerging church community might look like. By contrast **Living Proof** which found itself on its own, evolved its way through community based youth work, into becoming Christian community and church.
- 4 **Unit 8** began with a search for resources in a skilled person and in some premises, so the intention to become church was more intrinsic, rather than coming as the complete surprise which grew out of the work begun at **Living Proof**.
- 5 **Living Proof** has been in existence since 1993 and with previous connections in the target community. It therefore has a longer community track record and more resources in terms of short stay student volunteers, though less resources in terms of church monies.

How wider mission thinking will help discern the future of the next few years

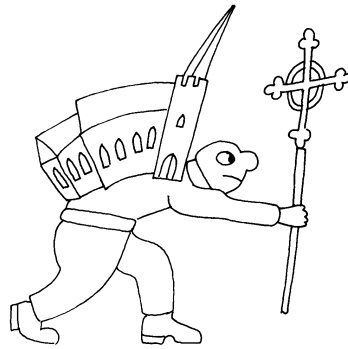
Take off the old clothes

In planting among the non-churched or deprived communities, who are normally distanced from existing forms of church, it is useful to set aside two particular inherited views of church.

- The first is that any new form of church must be congregational.
- The second is that church is essentially to do with what happens in a special building on a Sunday.

The assumptions may, or may not, be helpful in the new context. Setting them aside helps us explore the essence of Church more widely and apply that more accurately. Flexibility in mission initiative is best undergirded by well informed instincts about the essence of Church, rather than its form.

Radical, ecclesiology and best missiology are learning that they are estranged friends who joyfully can rediscover each other, often after too many years apart.

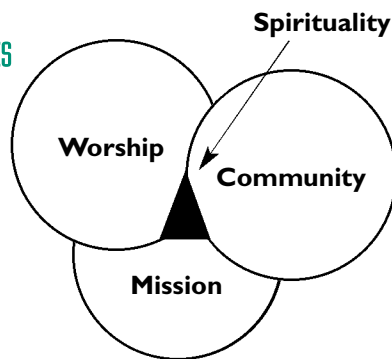


The burden of Tradition

Three circles: Three entry points

Robert Warren:
Building Missionary
Congregations

What is
Church
made of?
AND...



...Where
may we
begin
Church?

Robert Warren's *Building Missionary Congregations* page 20 draws a diagram of church as, Worship, Community and Mission, all held together and made alive by Spirituality, pulsing at the heart of the three. It is one of a number of very useful attempts to get to the core of what are the essential elements of Church.

For church planters this has additional significance, as Robert Warren himself hinted in 1997 at a church planting conference. It seems we can begin the planting process at any of these three points. In the recent past we, the church planting fraternity, have been too captive to our history and marked the "birth" of a plant by its first public worship service. We have begun with a focus on worship as the first defining mark of what it is to "do Church". However, it may be equally valid to begin elsewhere in the three circles. Moreover in communities more distanced from Christianity, it will be more logical to start with Mission, rather than Worship. In communities that are deprived or fractured, it seems compelling to begin, yet further back in the overall process, with forming Community. Some connect this with what Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali terms as the "Ministry of Presence".

The choice of entry point should be determined by the assessment of local culture and history which will show which is the more fitting way in. What is equally clear is that while doing church can be explored through any of these three entry points, the resultant Christian group must grow into all three circles of life, animated and glued together by spirituality, to qualify as being healthy Church. This tool not only points to a choice of ways in for prospective churches, but also acts as a thermometer that might measure health for existing churches. **We might find in many existing churches that it is not that they are sick of mission, but have become sick because they seldom engage in mission.**

The provision of these alternatives is a simple practical step to prevent potential planters from cloning existing church, because of lack of wisdom or insight. To assume worship should be the start point invites dangers of perpetuating a form of Church which will fail to engage with the needs of the group to be reached. It is an approach which fails to ask the missiological and cultural questions and so short-circuits the effectiveness of the planting team. As the western world becomes more culturally distanced from historic Christianity and more diverse in its forms, this consideration should become basic in the planning process for planting. This awareness is needed now, but it will take a change of mind to achieve.

Jesus in John's Gospel

Chapter 5 of John's Gospel brings strong emphasis on Jesus accurately discerning the will of the Father. He joins in with what he perceives the Father is already doing,

vs.19: "Jesus gave them this answer: 'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does.'"

This route in missionary spirituality is well suited to any pioneer planting venture. We see Jesus as the sharp edge of the Trinity acting in concerted Mission. It is not accidental that this is the Gospel which contains the dictum "As the Father sent me, so I send you and he breathed the Holy Spirit on them". In this cardinal mission verse, which contains its own foreshadowing of the Trinity, Jesus explicitly fastens his own present experience to our future practice. Modelling our approach on Jesus' mission and style is an important ideal and aspiration. His own apostolic identity (Hebrews 3.1), as being sent by the Father, is the foundation for the apostolic identity of the Church. It is all part of believing that we are but joining in with the *Missio Dei*. It nudges us into a responsive mode of activity which is a good foil to evangelistic activism. But it is a style which needs to be held humbly, for our antennae to the acts and voice of Father are less attuned than our Lord's, was even after his bestowal of the Spirit on us.

The Holy Spirit as independent Missionary Teacher

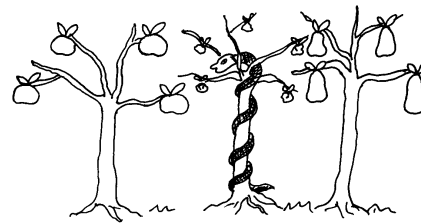
Experience in countries from which missionaries have been expelled, or in which missionaries are not allowed, suggests that God, who is the first missionary, works by the missionary Spirit to do his own evangelistic work without any human agency. He calls individuals through life experiences, he sends dreams and visions of a highly specific nature, and enlivens the scriptures without any human interpreter. All such signs are to be seen in operation in Acts 8-12 and also, for example, in the contemporary Church among Islam.

The same Spirit also teaches young converts in the faith without the customary teaching ministry of the Church. Co-operating with signs of this

activity can be another helpful contour of a pioneer's spirituality and approach in mission. It will be one way in which to discern what the Father is already doing. So among those who are Nonchurched, experiences of God should be expected, extraordinarily apt questions will be put, people will know things we never taught them. God himself will be at work ahead of us. We shall be but his interpreters following Him, rather than ambassadors that precede Him. How splendidly energising and humbling for evangelists and church planters.

Look for change rather than knowledge

The New Testament seems more impressed by what it calls fruit, than by human ability or cleverness. Take the long term character building qualities prized in Galatians 5 and termed fruits of the Spirit, or again note how the two servants given five and two talents respectively are praised in equal terms for the faithful deployment of their differing resources. It looks like the goal of Christian discipleship is transformation not information.



By their fruit you will know them.

In work among the non-churched, this could be a wise measure of progress. This will be especially pertinent in children and young people's work, as their conceptual abilities are still being formed. **Behavioural change may be a better indicator of spiritual life than credal statement.** Jesus

himself taught "By their fruits you will know them" Mt. 7: 16 & 20. Similar dynamics can be observed among non-book culture congregations.

Overlaps with Cell Church

It is likely that Cell insights have more to teach us in unchurched planting opportunities than do Seeker Service insights. Seeker work is valuable but its reported successes have been more among the dechurched, who will still cross the gap to what still looks and feels like church, even though the Sunday experience communicates by multi media presentation rather than

through worship and sermon. Cell, being yet more strongly relational based and with a significantly smaller unit size, breaks out of congregational and formal educational mode and provides a context for reactive and applied learning. It also provides a way to begin to build up a Christian community without giving hostages to fortune about when that group may, or may not, opt to have some form of congregational expression. Thus the valuable discontinuity between traditional church and emerging church is sustained longer, giving the emerging church more time to find out what it is supposed to grow into as indigenous church, within and for its own culture.

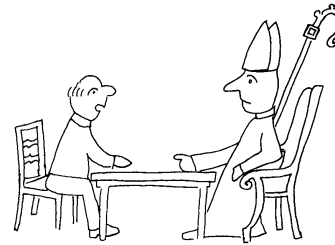
Working with the fragile

Work among more profoundly non-churched groups in a post Christendom and post modern world is likely to be slow and patchy. The work itself will be fragile. Last week's encouraging response will be followed by next week's crashing failure. Jesus at work for three years among the ups and downs of life with the disciples reveals similar tensions and this can hearten us. The most realistic book title about local church life I ever came across was by Derek Copley and was memorably called *Building with Bananas*. Any local church minister knows the touching frailty and bruising cussedness of the local Church, of which he or she is clearly a part.

The Isaiah servant songs have a timeless application to the Church, itself a servant of The Servant. Chapter 42 predicts a life of work among bruised reeds and smouldering wicks, which resonates with the reality of life among the marginalised. **The ability to live with uncertainty and marked swings will be marks of the pioneer's spirituality.** Vulnerability will characterise this kind of venture for some years to come. Both the emerging and sending churches need to expect this and not lose countenance at a long story, revealing glimpses of glory amidst a mess.

Doing church before becoming Church

These hints can inform and sustain any kind of mission work which is experimental and risky. It seems Church becomes increasingly difficult to define exhaustively, the more radical the missionary context. Yet Anglicanism has the unhelpful tendency to be more fundamentalist about church order and



We could both be redundant!

doctrine than any other area of its theology and this tendency towards "morphological fundamentalism" needs resisting (*The Church for Others* WCC 1967). It will take secure Bishops and Incumbents who put trust in each other, and in an evolving accountable process between them, to let what should emerge find its own shape. It may often be

the case that the new work finds it is doing church before it is clear how it should be Church. That is, there will be elements of serving the local community, responding to spiritual interest, prayer, witness, professions of faith, changes in lives - these look suspiciously like church beginning to happen, but without a clear pattern of how Church should organise. However, life before organisation is a good path to follow.

Longer term issues to watch

Local Partnerships but not Chaplaincy

The regeneration of a local community will take more money than the local or even diocesan Church can readily release. The Church living in the demise of Christendom will have only two choices - to join forces with others of goodwill, or to lower its sights on what can be achieved in holistic mission. Increasingly we no longer have the power, or money, for the Christendom model of controlling the projects or goodwill we dispense to others. Not only that, but control is becoming a more and more inappropriate model in a pluralist society.

In this and in other cases the new way will mean partnership with local people, not the giving of charity in its patronising sense. Partnership will help empower others - one of the underlying issues in dealing with deprivation. Partnership will become a distinctive element in the regeneration of communities. This can be welcomed in the spirit of Jesus who taught in Mark 9:40 "whoever is not against us is for us." It's quite an astonishing statement to accompany a ministry which provoked much comment and opposition. His apparently contradictory teaching in Luke 11:23 "He who is

not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.” is in the context of those who attributed his work to the Evil One. To suggest a possible contemporary dynamic equivalence, would be those who insist that white is black. Not all partnerships are desirable, but the principle is.

There is a danger attendant in partnership. Often the church becomes seen as the minor partner – or religious specialist – in a social scheme for an area. I have seen elsewhere that when this mentality has crept over into the formation of a church plant, the leaders are, in effect, viewed as chaplains, controlled by others. They are wanted, but this may be simply as providers of innocuous events like community singing and a children’s Sunday school.

The peril is that they minister on the terms of the local community and only to what those people deem to be needed. Thus the Lordship of Christ, the cutting edge of the Gospel and the radical alternative of a new alternative community posed by the Kingdom, are in real danger of being compromised.

Those truly planting Churches cannot be content with providing an acceptable religious veneer to compassionate service and social transformation. While working for, and being pleased with, service and transformation, the Church also has its own agendas. Plants need freedom of self-determination to see that claim made into reality. Plants linked to external funding would need to think through this area and not submit to captivity by secular agendas, reinforced by political correctness. We have a spiritual distinctive to bring to the partnership, we have a Lord to serve and a Gospel of which we should not be ashamed. One of our convictions is that such elements are essential and not negotiable.

The recent book *“Beyond the Good Samaritan”* by Anne Morisy, which I hope will become highly influential, would repay further investigation. It holds the tension between evangelism and social engagement in mission admirably and is robust and practical about the specifically Christian element the Church is called to bring. This prompts us to ensure that a Christian evangelistically driven distinctive remains part of our focus and identity. **The best evangelism has nothing to do with an imperialism of ideas, it is the outstretched fingers of the loving search made by a missionary God.**

Building a core team

When I made my initial visit in April 1998, a coherent cohesive team had not yet formed. There were a variety of individuals committed to running various projects at **Unit 8** and such a diversity of approaches is helpful for building contacts and community relationships. The weakness was that this set of people were not committed to being the embryonic form of the church on the estate. The contours of a healthy Church on Hirst Wood will best be formed, not only by projects and programmes led by interested parties, but by the quality of common life experienced by the Christians called to pioneer being Church there. Unless there is a change from a disparate collection of individual enterprise to the formation of a cohesive team who know how to love, to pray, to work and to be together, the birth of the Church will take its character from programmes not relationships and the valuable connection with Cell Church thinking could be jeopardised at the start.

When the Roman world remarked *“See how these Christians love one another”*, we miss half the point if we simply and think *“what a nice bunch of people they must have been”*. That reality was not just a passing complement, it was the single largest missionary dynamic of the early Church. Hence the paucity of evangelistic exhortation in the New Testament and the frequent passionate calls for the practicalities of a loving community.

Since April 1998, Chris and Tim have gathered together the different volunteers helping in various aspects of **Unit 8’s** work. From September they have intended to meet monthly, alternating between an evening of prayer covering different aspects of the work, and a social evening to share supper together and use the time to build relationships:

“By getting people together in this way we’re trying to develop a common sense of commitment to this work rather than people feeling they were isolated individuals contributing in only one area.”

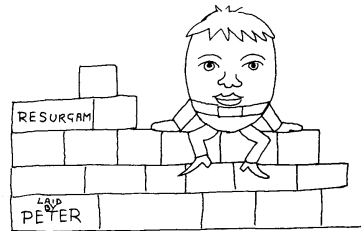
A Generous spirit at the sending Church

Officially Tim Sudworth works a third of his time heading youth work for the parish, a third in schools and a third for the plant. Whether in his time or that of his successor, the question of adjusting this towards the plant should

be asked. Pioneer work is often characterised by high availability and tenacious stickability. It takes take inordinate amounts of time to see evangelistical breakthroughs in the community and in forming indigenous Church. Only a generous spirit in the sending church will have the courage to realise that missionary work in the parish is necessarily sacrificial. It may mean giving away some of the best resources of people to take forward the first steps already taken. There are encouraging signs in the St Peter's Shipley story that this releasing is happening.

Backward planning

The art or discipline of asking about a project, "Where do we want to be in five years time?" has proved energising for some plants. It sets them free to see more clearly what the long term



objectives are and from that basis to begin to put in steps which build in that direction. Here, the very nature of church plants has something useful to teach us. As plants they are vulnerable new initiatives in evangelism and as Churches, they are new expressions of ecclesial communities.

Their identity is to be Church and to be Mission. As long as both poles of this core identity are adhered to and both are being developed towards maturity, the right paths are more likely to be found. Ask what a mission minded maturing church on Hirst Wood in AD 2004 should look like and priorities, staff appointments, and decisions will begin to come into focus.

An example is the response to one of their disappointments. Effective contact with adult members of the community seems resisted and lags behind. In an area low on mission sowing over the years, it's not surprising. The important work among the older people goes ahead and the children's and youth work is increasingly valued. However, in between they are not yet clear how things should go forward. Yet the long view is for church for the whole age span of the community. In the light of that, regular visiting of the parents of the children and young people in their homes is a way forward. It will yield some sense of

how **Unit 8** is viewed and what might be developed from relationships with parents.

A longer term aim is the parish wide vision for youth and children's ministry. The hope and prayer is that in the parish of St. Peter's, every child, from first school to the end of secondary education, will have been given a positive opportunity of meeting a credible Christian and so hearing something of the Christian faith. An expression of extending this vision in upper schools involved a week long mission doing over 40 lessons including RE, PE, Art and Media Studies and generally just being in and around the school where some of the young people from **Unit 8** attend. The unicyclist fire juggler went down well.



Two other signs occur in Saltaire First School (350 pupils). Christian parents meet regularly to pray in the school on a Thursday morning, with complete support from the Head who is increasingly happy to ask parents to pray for particular areas of need. The after school club for children of 4-9 years known as "Wonder Stuff" has been going since February 1998. It has grown to 40 children on the books, with others on the waiting list. Both are expressions now of the vision for the future, enabling children and young



people who otherwise wouldn't hear anything about Jesus to be able to do so, while extending opportunities to communicate with parents and others in the area.

Subsidy and adult identity for the Church Plant

Throughout Anglican history the assumption for new churches is that the ultimate goal is for them to grow to parochial status. This has been our gold standard to measure maturity. At the same time, the mentality behind daughter church and satellite service language has meant the path to supposed maturity will be a long one, or even remain permanently out of reach. Tragically, too often permanent adolescence, or even failure, has been built in from the start. It matters that attaining maturity is possible.

Maturity is also legitimately connected to viability. In the last ten years the issue of parishes moving to being financially self-sufficient has become more critical. Levels of national subsidy consistently reduce, while the Church of England largely continues to be committed to full-time stipendiary ministry as the norm of parochial church leadership, even in the face of ever declining overall clergy numbers.

Hirst Wood is geographically not populous enough ever to become a parish and serves a community so financially and socially disadvantaged as to be unlikely ever to pay its way. So, it will be important to ask questions about relevant ways to foster and gauge maturity in this case. This is not an unusual position even for historic parishes working in the Inner City. The Diocesan share provides a form of permanent subsidy on an agreed basis. The dangers are that continuing church subsidy models will merely echo the unwelcome passivity of a nanny state mentality. Being the permanent poor relation is too slender a base for identity.

Options will emerge by thinking through the following questions

- Is congregation or cell is to be the unit size for Hirst Wood?
- What part does mission effectiveness to the culture have in measuring maturity ?
- Is maturity to be gauged by financial viability, and if not, how can subsidy be transparent without creating immature dependence?
- How can the family of churches in that parish recognise different types of maturity in each other?

- What positives can the Hirst Wood church bring to the family of churches that make up the St Peter Shipley parish - how can mutual interdependence be fostered?
- What balance is to be struck between indigenous leadership and outside appointments?
- Should the leadership include a stipendiary post?
- How can the diocese recognise the Hirst Wood church, so safeguarding its future within the parish?

A rare bird?

As usual with newer forms of becoming church, the questions are more plentiful than the answers. Yet enough is emerging from a variety of places to have some certainty that the questions posed are among the correct ones. This then makes Hirst Wood, and other ventures like it, of particular interest. In the totally different discipline of bird watching, rarity is prized, the first arrival of migrants is heralded, breeding of rare species is encouraged and supported. It could be like that as we continue to move into the Millennium:

- the new forms of church among the most unchurched need to be watched, because they are prized not because they are surprising
- they are early arrivals of a new mission to a new age and they warrant positive discrimination not ecclesiastical recrimination
- learning to breed such churches so that they flourish in the hostile environment, such that they in turn will mature and be able to reproduce, requires a welcome.

Let **Unit 8's** own own request round off this investigation:

“Pray for us as we continue to understand what it means to be Church on the Hirst Wood estate, that the fragile nature of this work will keep us dependent on the Lord and that He will build His church the way He wants it to be. May we be a church radically devoted to Christ irrevocably committed to each other and relentlessly dedicated to reaching those outside God’s family.”

A challenge with some charts

There are groups and writing on work with local authority housing and inner urban areas, and I mention a few for those who want to know more.

- National Estate Churches Network (which now has 9 regional groups)
Andrew Davey,
c/o BSR, Church House
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3NZ
and a booklet *The Challenge of the Estates*: Bishop Laurie Green: £2
- Evangelical Urban Training Project - to be known as Unlock from May 99
- specialising also in non book culture:
Jenny Richardson
336a City Road
Sheffield S2 1GA
- Urban Training Unit,
210 Abbeyfield Road
Sheffield S4 7AZ
- Southwark Diocese has appointed an Estates
Officer for 2 Deaneries: Revd Benny Hazlehurst

I ask other people in the field to forgive my ignorance in not mentioning them.

Revd George W. Lings
Director of The Sheffield Centre
April 1999

Cartoons by Tim Sharp: Deal

Unit 8:

Out of sight, out of nothing

**For further details of Unit 8 please contact
Revd Chris Edmondson or Tim Sudworth**

**St Peter's Church
Moorhead Lane
ShIPLEY, West Yorkshire
BD16 4JH
01274 400391**



Unit 8 trip to Granada Studios