

Encounters on the Edge



New Canterbury Tales

Why have Network churches sprung up in Canterbury Diocese? At what cost and by what means? Are these new and do we need them? If so why, and how can they flourish? **George Lings re-traces his own steps and delves further.**

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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



ChurchArmy

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A Series of Quarterly Investigations from

The Sheffield Centre

No. 7



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Surprise!

Driving down the A2 south of Canterbury, the tower of the Cathedral delightfully dominates the cityscape, night or day. “Head office” Anglicans might murmur whimsically to themselves. For visitors, Canterbury conjures up history, architectural splendour, choral worship; the Church of England as its serene self.

Some local clergy, not many years ago, sometimes felt the Diocese had an exaggerated sense of its own importance. I actually heard an official say: “We must be careful, for we might set a precedent for the rest of the Anglican Communion.” In contrast, some of us thought it would be good if the Diocese caught up with the rest of the Anglican Communion! The Diocese has a traditional urban rural mix with many villages. At 200 clergy it feels compact and easy to get to know. **Not a hot bed of ecclesiastical revolution** you would think, yet in 1999 surprisingly it contained half of the nation’s more controversial Church Plants - Network Churches. How had this come about? Let’s go back a bit.

The 1991 cross boundary plants crisis

From January 1990 to February 1991 four unauthorised cross-boundary ventures were launched; three were charismatic evangelical, one classic evangelical. “Inbred” incumbents voiced disapproval in injured tones. The bishops concerned sought in vain for solutions to satisfy all parties. The national newspapers carried contentious articles, with predictable press emphases on conflict and inflammatory talk of **a threat to the parochial system**.

In the same period, authors influential in the Anglican church planting movement were making **clarion calls for radical change**. Charlie Cleverly, vicar of a church with three plants, running out of further areas within the parish, wrote *Church Planting our future hope* SU 1989 calling for a ten year

suspension of the parochial system. Bishop David Pytches, from whose church one of the “illegal” plants came, spoke out and subsequently wrote

“The parochial system is the condom of the Church of England”.

NewWineskins p 20 Eagle 1991

The signals portrayed church planting as a self-evident movement of the missionary Holy Spirit and by contrast painted the man-made bureaucratic structures of the Church of England as dispensable.

The pace of planting also increased. From one a month in 1988, to 40 per year in 1991. The growing interest in this hitherto largely ignored activity, the sharp questions of polity raised by the cross-boundary plants and concern that the worrying latter trend might spread further, led to the setting-up of a working party by the House of Bishops in 1991.

“Breaking New Ground”

I was privileged to serve on the working party and to learn others perceptions of the values and dangers raised by church plants. The result sowed a seed in the wider church. The subtitle of the report’s key first chapter is “A vision of church: territory, neighbourhood and network”. While too brief to be dignified as a Theology of Church, it seeded a revised Anglican understanding.

What is its vision?

Two sentences encapsulate the thrust.

*“We may say then that many in the Church of England, not just those involved in church planting, are asking for recognition that **human life is lived in a complex array of networks** and that neighbourhoods where people reside may hold only a very minor loyalty.”* “Breaking New Ground” section 1.7

*“**We need therefore to find ways to enable diverse styles of church life to co-exist** without always having recourse to territorial, or even denominational boundaries and here the church planting movement has much to teach us.”*

“Breaking New Ground” section 1.9

Here in a report to Bishops, is advocacy that **the parish system is seriously outmoded**. (This is not new. The thin end of the wedge was inserted, back in

the 1920's, with the granting of full parochial rights to those beyond a parish, who qualify by attendance to join its electoral roll.) The report aimed for a Church with flexibility to adhere to what lies behind the parish system without being enslaved by a structure no longer able to deliver the goal of a 'church for all people'. This vision argues that the idea of boundary, the old guarantor of theological diversity and apportioner of pastoral responsibility, must be amended. **Boundary is to be transcended by reworking the idea from its roots - the calling of a mission to a nation** - arriving at a vision of territory, neighbourhood **and** network. It shifted the way we should understand our Anglican identity and mission.

How does this change our thinking?

- Firstly, the nation contains neighbourhoods which cross parish boundaries, or several neighbourhoods within one parish. To form worshipping, mission minded, Christian communities for each neighbourhood is a legitimate aspiration for Anglicans.
- Secondly, socially and culturally cohesive networks exist though more geographically diffuse than neighbourhoods. These too call for Anglican churches, or else we deny our identity to be accessible for all people.

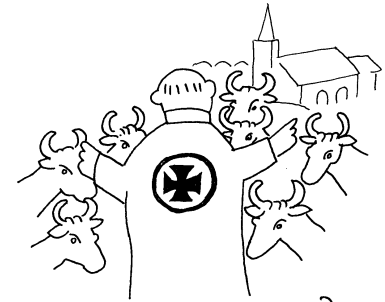
So **it is entirely possible to be fully Anglican and engage in radical church planting.** This is a launching out into the deep, going beyond a tidy but outmoded, historic but failing, territorial parochialism. It admits that making everybody the responsibility of parish clergy is a far cry from imagining them to be effectively churched. The history of sector ministers in hospitals, education and industry, to reach other groupings in society recognises this. Churches for networks extend this awareness.

Such theology and strategy has its taproot in the Incarnation. This does not endorse just being where people are, but becoming truly like them. **The breathtaking leap of the Incarnation of Christ is not his arrival at Bethlehem but the advent of God becoming human.** Incarnation endorses movement and change in the style of Mission. What a contrast to the majority of our static practice.

“One of the major factors in membership decline has been the churches inability to respond to demographic change. It has not re-located to where the people are.”

Robin Gill: Beyond Decline: A Challenge to the Churches 1992

To be fair, he here argues for the relocation of clergy from country to town, but if networks are a social address, then a Church that is serious about being a Church for England must determine to be knocking at the network door too.



Sacred Cows?

Why this history from the early 1990's?

Because *“Breaking New Ground”* is the

Anglican birthright of the Network church. It is a Magna Carta underwriting life beyond the parish boundary, which all prospective network planters need to master. Curiously the report came to be written because of cross boundary church plants. **What has happened since is the birth of the non boundary church plant.** As one network church in Huddersfield calls itself - *“the Church of England without walls.”*

The Carpenters tale



Mission impossible?

Deal is a coastal town of some 30,000 people. Diverse in population age, types of housing and employment, its attraction and limitation are that it is on the road to nowhere - literally at the edge of the country. Four parishes serve it, which by their distinct traditions act as **a microcosm of the width of the Church of England.** People freely cross parish boundaries to find the worship style and provision for their families that suit their needs. I was Vicar of St George's from 1985 to 1997. After initial growth, from 1989 St George's struggled with an 80% full building and a numerical plateau. As the single largest congregation, but with the single smallest parish in the town, there was a severe structural blockage in developing its mission.

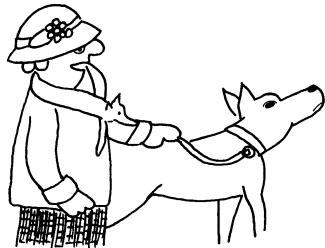
A parish weekend in September 1992 led by Revd Charlie Cleverly focussed on church planting but without any clear idea of how aspiration could become

actuality. November 1992 was designated a month of prayer during which, we believed, specific guidance on our dilemma would dawn. That month Alan Dodds, a friend from years back, phoned. He was coming towards the end of a graduate course and looking for a job in training. With my planting connections, did I know of any openings? I knew of nothing and after pleasantries the phone went down. Two minutes later I did have an idea and heart in mouth I called back. "Alan, what about Deal?"

Cold water deluged upon this tiny spark. Alan, and Chris his wife, didn't want a parochial job. There was no money to pay him. We knew that the diocese had always firmly resisted any notion that St George's needed or merited any additional staff. Multiplying the St George's style of ministry had been resisted by the Pastoral Committees. No way.

During the summer of 1992 a sermon, designed to prepare for the parish weekend, had struck a resonant note. Quite unaware of the currency it would gain, I coined the analogy that most

Anglican worship is suited for people from Radio 3 and Radio 4 cultures. I highlighted the need for supplementary Church of England congregations for people identifying with Radio 1 and Radio 2 - different styles of communication, irrespective of class or intelligence.



"I can't imagine Terry Wogan as a Vicar..."

How curious

Carrying these pieces of a jigsaw for which I saw no completed picture, I met for a routine appraisal meeting with the Archdeacon of Canterbury Michael Till. He quickly grasped our dilemma and the mission diagnosis. He heard with interest that "it so happened" a very suitable candidate for plant leader had popped up from nowhere. "Why not make it a Radio One Deanery Plant?" was his audacious suggestion.

It made so much sense. Radio 1 and Radio 2 people exist all over the neighbourhood of the town. None of the four parishes were making much impact on such a culture - so no criticism of our Anglican neighbours could be

read in. **If the Deanery could see this was a common mission goal then all could rejoice if it should prosper.** As a Diocesan project, Church order was rightly preserved, while with Deanery co-operation, parish boundaries would be honoured but supplemented. If it were subsequently judged a success, this might be a model for others. It was not my experience in the previous seven years to walk out of the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral with a light heart; I recall this time I actually sang.

Quite rightly, such a sensitive idea needed diocesan brokerage to turn into reality. It gained the warm approval of the new Episcopal Team. Archdeacon Michael Till led the consultation with the deanery clergy, a task I could not have done. Despite his advocacy, **reactions were mixed, from generous encouragement to overt suspicion.** In the deanery, unusually there were 4 women priests among the 14 clergy. They were far more affirming than the men. Rightly, lines of accountability were agreed and willingness to forward the supervised experiment given. A plant from St George's, with Diocesan approval and Deanery accountability, became the language used.

In the meantime Alan Dodds had curiously found himself drawn to the idea, despite competing job offers from the Seychelles. He came for interview with the Archdeacon, Rural Dean and myself. This light turned green. Lastly we came to money. A simple budget for two years to cover salary, expenses, renting a building and setting up costs was cast. This came out at around £50,000. The Diocese decided to give £10,000, from its Growth and Opportunities Fund, and the Jerusalem Trust granted £6000. St George's congregation took two weeks to pledge and promise the rest. Alan and Chris found a house two minutes away from where we both work. Staff offices for us all were created in a separate back third of what had been the vicarage. These premises also became available in 1992, out of the blue.

Why tell the tale? It has **the uncanny marks of divine fingerprints**. To us in the parish it was an incredible story of impossibility turned into reality.



"It's not quite the Seychelles but it does have a beach!"

Its wider significance is the demonstration of much “*Breaking New Ground*” stands for. **Partnership between Diocese and Parish, held in mutual trust, is the way ahead for a sustainable future**, transcending barriers of tradition and boundary. Such relationships enable the parish principle to be complemented. Networks of people, not just geographical areas, can be identified, reached and served. The report is not a pipe dream, but shown to be possible. It was a ground breaking precedent.

Getting ready

This stunning conception was followed by a slow gestation. Alan Dodds joined St George’s in summer 1993. **The sending church deliberately took the view that the intentional giving away of resources and power to the sent church was the right spiritual dynamic**, founded in Jesus’ dictum “*it is more blessed to give than to receive*”. I knew that failure to empower and to release had hindered other church plants.

The gelling of the planting team was not so straightforward. Alan wrote,

“We found that although we had all attended the same church, we did not in fact know each other very well. Various personality issues arose, including a serious personality clash. Some decided to leave, and others, despite some problems, decided to stay and work the issues out.”

In the initial year, from 30 who showed interest, a planting team of 18 adults and 13 children volunteered to go with him and began to meet midweek to grow together and plan strategy.

Finding the right venue was not easy. Suitable buildings, with toilets and extra rooms for groups, were all in other parishes. Alan approached individual Clergy. Some were unwilling, especially if a venue was near their church, others were quite open. Eventually Alan found Linwood (pictured right), a youth club which locally had a somewhat seedy



reputation. Fortunately the Rector of the parish of St Leonard’s, Toby Marchand, had accepted the principle of a network plant. As Rural Dean he had interviewed Alan. We are indebted to his ministry and vision and of his successor David Kendrew, that the plant was welcomed. Without that attitude it would not have been helpful or right to go. It speaks volumes for the increased trust growing up between churches of differing traditions that such a partnership was forged. Bishop Gavin Reid launched the plant - now marvellously entitled *The Carpenter’s Arms* - on Oct 8th 1994, with some 90 people present.

What’s in a name?

Until recently what visitors experience at *The Carpenter’s Arms* is **different to “normal” church**. While there is a focal point - a table and screen, the room is laid out on Sunday in pub or café style, with chairs around tables. The tables are key. Snacks and crisps go on them,



Café style church

which the children love. Some children called it ‘the crisp church’! Secondly, they provide a place for cups, bibles, diaries and toys. Thirdly and significantly, **the tables act as a kind of safety barrier for people**. They can sit and feel they are not ‘at the front’, just as in a pub. Perhaps it is not so much Radio 1 or 2 as Channel 4’s *Big Breakfast*. The morning starts with 15 minutes of various drinks and people milling about, **just as if *The Carpenter’s Arms* was a pub**. In society you offer this when people arrive, not shortly before they go - that only happens in churches!

Resources for worship -both songs and written liturgy - are on the overhead projector. Alienating books and interminable page numbers are out. Setting people at ease is vital and laughter is perhaps the best aid for welcome so **humour has been an important factor** in drama, sermons and even notices. It is very deliberate, and jokes are told for the fun of it. The aim is to try to be cringe free for newcomers, chiming in with Seeker style. It went

against the grain of the charismatic emphasis on worship for Alan to state that outreach was the primary responsibility. In his own words:

“Of course both worship and evangelism are vital to the life of the church, however we will have eternity to worship, but only life on this earth to evangelise.”

The team decided that Sunday morning ‘time together’ would be the main time for evangelism. As a result, they think very carefully about the balance and timing of what happens, to be accessible to all ages and therefore usually brisk. This single emphasis has probably given rise to most tensions in the church, especially for any Christians who have subsequently joined. They were used to church being primarily for worship, with the outreach taking place elsewhere.

A tough first year

Then, despite the resources of good preparation prior to launch, an able leader, and the gift of good people who became the new congregation, they struggled for at least the first six months. As well as wanting to be like a pub, they tried some of the tested methods of outreach; Alpha, an evangelistic home group and a Christmas event, but each was depressingly unsuccessful. Indeed, even the use of homes for Christian groups had limited success, because **as a small network church they did not have enough contacts**. There were periods of self-doubt and introspective analysis. The only new people who came, seemed to be visitors from other churches who wanted to see how they were doing. How good that the call was so clear. **Clarity of call assists in the temptations of the wilderness that may follow.**

Alan reflects *“here our training was inadequate, mainly because Chris and I had never church planted before.”* I couldn’t help him, because in reality none of us knew how a network church would fare. We were both on the edge of our experience. We did not know to tell the church to expect slow growth. Slow, because the relatively small group sent out only had their network of friends for a fringe. There were no other contacts. Slow, because the team still had to learn to see the whole of life through evangelistic eyes. In a well established church this had never been their caste of mind.

How did any growth come?

Some Christians who newly moved to Deal looked at the existing range of churches and felt God’s call to *The Carpenter’s Arms* (TCA). Resources to serve others were slowly growing. Significantly Alan (below with his wife, Chris) had 25 years of experience as a lay evangelist with the Church Army, Youth For Christ and Crusaders, mostly with young people and training youth leaders. Chris his wife, a trained teacher and Crusader leader, was able to co-ordinate the children’s work. **A crucial part of the development of TCA was attracting whole families, through children’s work**



and contacts with schools. Linwood also had a walled garden so, in summer at least, it was a kids paradise. The parents were concerned that the church met their children’s needs as well as their own. Some indeed identified the ‘child friendly’ approach as being the most significant factor in their attachment to the church.

A fascinating surprise within Seeker service philosophy is their experience of **Communion as a focus for evangelistic commitment**. Monthly, an aspect of the Gospel was taught and related to breaking bread and outpouring of wine. In receiving, the indwelling of Christ was also highlighted. Other groups like Alternative Worship and some strands of Church for Gen X report similar evangelistic energy in Eucharist. Their conviction grew that Christ being lifted up did draw people to himself (Jn 12.32). In Alan’s words,

“This has been one of the most significant aspects of evangelism in The Carpenter’s Arms. It is not only that people hear the Gospel through Communion, but it is there and then that a response can be made.”

A club for junior children, unattached to church, was started and quickly drew in some 25. Nine months on, an older group for young secondary school kids grew out of it. Links with their parents began to be formed and a few people started sniffing round the edges, including those had lapsed from faith years

before. For Christmas 95, TCA put on a pantomime and drew large audiences. Slowly they were getting known and forming a fringe. A parenting course was piloted with members and then run for those on this emerging fringe. In 1996, over 50 adults and 35 children was becoming normal on Sunday and they were filling up the premises. By Easter 96, there were 100 people for the first time. Alan and Chris caught local imagination and support by spending their 25th wedding anniversary in the Ukraine, bringing medical supplies to those still suffering from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. By 1999, TCA had grown to approximately 90 adults and 50 children. Alan estimates a third who joined were converts; adult baptisms are celebration of this. Most of the remainder were Christians moving into the area, though in the fifth year, refugees falling out of one or two other free churches also joined. In a variety of ways **The Carpenter's Arms slowly penetrated the life of the town, but without any parish base to work from.**

Measuring maturity

Maturity is classically assessed by the Three Self Principle of Henry Venn.

- 1 This young church is **self governing** from the start it had representation on the St George's PCC, but all its operational decisions were its own. Alan was ordained in October 1995, which added governmental credibility. Steered through by Archdeacon John Pritchard, Carpenter's Arms was **legally recognised** as an "Extra Parochial Place" in November 1998. **It has gained Anglican citizenship**, but outside the parish system. So it no longer looks to St George's for any validation and is fully itself. Readers wanting to know more about the legal instrument are invited to contact the Sheffield Centre or the Archdeacon of Canterbury.
- 2 At the outset, a principle of diminishing subsidy was agreed as one objective test of ongoing viability. Subsidy would reduce to zero in four years. That target was achieved and later, following an invited visit from the Diocesan stewardship team, the church had the highest per capita giving in the diocese. It is **self financing**.
- 3 But maturity for TCA does not simply mean getting large enough to avoid extinction and to justify its own existence. Venn's third test is **Self**

reproducing. Maturity includes being able, under God, to seek further the extension of the Kingdom - by demonstrating the reproduction of the quality of its life among and beyond its members. Lay leadership has flourished, but also by 1997, there was talk of the next venue when Linwood is outgrown, or whether the plant should itself plant into another needy area or network in the Deanery. Seeds in good ground produce a crop, including more seeds.

Life should lead to life.

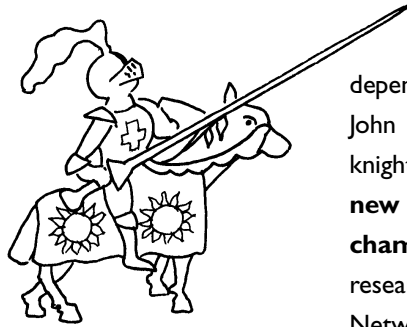
Size matters

Alan and his team also noticed **a critical size for their style of outreach.** At first, with only 35, they were too small for anybody to feel anonymous. At around 100, they were getting too big to keep the intimacy of the pub atmosphere, so attractive to many people. Pressure of numbers in the building eventually led to the café style being squeezed out in 1999. The style required a 'midsize congregation' unit. Partly driven by this, when they reached 140, they sent out a small group of 20 adults and children to start a new congregation at the invitation of Revd Mark Roberts, Rector of Sandwich. This smaller town in the Deanery is 7 miles away, but where some members lived. This story is still developing and too young to tell but these numbers sent were quickly replaced in Deal, so the decision of how to multiply remains. If the theory is right then multiplying, rather than simply going big, is the best option. However, providing leadership of such an expanding model of mid size congregations is not easy to achieve.

Succession or obstruction?

Alan had always said to me that he would stay five years. He is a pioneer and that length of time seems his natural cycle. **The loss of the pioneer leader is the Beecher's brook of the Planting Grand National** and has claimed several victims. What would happen at this dangerous juncture?

A phone call from Bev Newman, Reader at TCA, alerted me to the need for a successor and to an alarming story that the Deanery, obliged to reduce staffing by one, was thinking of not replacing Alan. This has happened elsewhere leading to plants being starved of resources and slowly withering to closure. I wrote to Archdeacon John and was much reassured to gather that as an Extra Parochial Place, and with the minister in charge as a Bishop's post, the succession was not



Sir Galahad de Pritchard
to the rescue.

dependant on the overall pastoral plan. John might be embarrassed to be seen as knight-errant to a maiden church plant, but **new forms of church do need their champions in the structures.** Having researched the stories of the half dozen Network churches that exist, I am fairly convinced that despite the evident quality of local leadership being exercised, without a

friend at court, each one of them might have been eradicated. **New forms of church are a vulnerable business; both pioneers and advocates on Episcopal staffs take commendable risks.**

The *Carpenters Arms* believed they wouldn't have an interregnum and worked with the Diocese toward that goal. The Diocese made a welcome further commitment to the project by promising to buy a house, as Alan had bought his own. In Deal, acquiring a vicarage is a six figure investment; the Diocese putting its money where its mouth was. The interview process drew good candidates at the end of August 99. After a very thorough process of presentations, wider consultation and interview, Mike Schorah was chosen and began the day after Alan left. **This church seems to specialise in clear starts.**

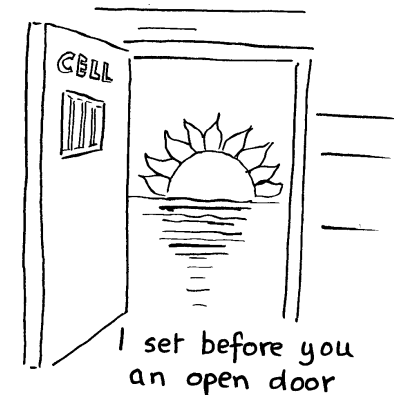
The next chapter

The first six months of the hand over has seen Mike work hard with the Ministry Leadership Team to establish what needed to be done. Three priorities from an earlier assessment on TCA were identified, using material from *Natural Church Development* Improving the quality of worship, leadership that empowered others and starting holistic small groups have stayed in focus, together with the clear need to establish a steering group for the Sandwich TCA. Beneath this was the recognition that TCA began as a relationally based church. **Its very growth to 200 adults and children was tempting it to revert to traditional patterns of clients and providers.** But Mike had experienced how a large church effectively used Cell thinking to break through this tendency, and enabled Christians to cease being consumers and once more focus on being disciples, who themselves make further disciples.

They have also worked together over weeks and hours, at values that underlie structural and public ministries. They have worked with materials from Robert Warren's *Building Missionary Congregations* and Rick Warren's *Purpose driven church*, consulted with the congregation and re-read their Bibles. They are coining simple statements that express in memorable short phrases the values of commitment to quality worship, effective community, Jesus style ministry, Jesus focused discipleship and loving outreach. The desire is for TCA people to identify round values that then infuse activity with spiritual integrity. Moreover, **it is only values in a changing mission world that will be flexible enough to be expressed in changing forms in the future.** Cell is less a structure than an expression of values and test groups were launched in May 2000 with material to apply them. The intention is that they will express the core of the next chapter of this young church.

Beneath all this the new leader and his wife Cathy, are having to build trust. Being a network Church, TCA is nothing but relational, and transition to Cell is a marked change of gear for all existing churches. It also sits amidst parish churches and those of other denominations, and needs to build trust with them. I was intrigued and pleased that Mike has already been asked to be secretary of the Deal Fraternal and there are signs of a level of joint prayer and co-operation in mission to the area, which I never detected in the twelve years I knew it. Unity around mission is a new post denominational watchword and it may be that a non-boundary church, designed for networks, has been a healthy catalyst for such progress.

I don't know whether this is fanciful, but on my arrival in 1985 I sensed an open door for taking the life of St George's Deal forward. The leaders and members then did not allow me the luxury of a year to settle and consult. We leapt forward and that momentum continued unabated till 1991. As I listened to Mike, coming at the same age as I was then, history appeared to be repeating itself.

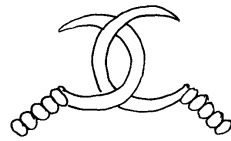


The Harvester's Tale

Preparation

Kerry Thorpe admits to a love hate relationship with the institution. Read his Grove Evangelism booklet no. 40 *Doing things Differently* for a flavour of these passions; he yearns for church that lives up to its biblical calling and **he mourns for a church content with passive mediocrity** and pallid inoffensiveness. Despite being a Cathedral chorister, he has known trades as diverse as horse racing and funeral directing. ACCM turned him down first time for having "too romantic a career". After curacies with distinguished incumbents, from 1984-93 he led what became a highly effective church, St George's Fatfield in Washington, county Durham. There a small congregation of 30 was revived and grew to 300, sending out a flourishing church plant. Here he knew deep satisfaction in seeing the values, in which he believed, work within the established church.

In 1993 he and his wife Eunice (pictured right) were headhunted for Holy Trinity Margate (known locally as HTM). This evangelical flagship in the Diocese of Canterbury enjoyed the highest congregations, including a new church plant. The incumbent had just gone to Lambeth as Chaplain. Called to interview he tried to make it difficult for them to say yes, advocating radical shake up of the existing patterns. The parish reps promised a clearing of the ground and an end to traditional dominance. He went.



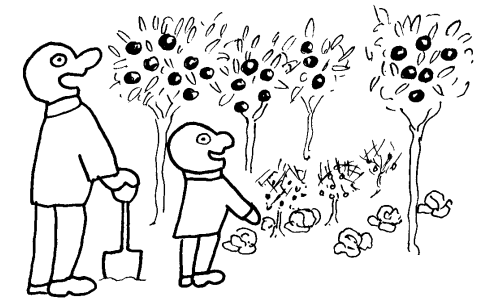
Difficulty

The proposed strategy was for three different congregations; a separate church for St Philip's the vigorous plant, a traditional congregation and a contemporary Family Service at Holy Trinity, each led by a separate leader. Each would thrive in their diversity within an agreed overall vision. Such **good planting orthodoxy about multiple congregations** was voted for by the PCC, accepted by Bishops and yet unravelled by later resistance and protest. He wrote,

"I fairly quickly learned that talk about change is cheap. It is even welcome. The real trouble begins when you begin actually to implement the visions and dreams that are being expressed." Doing things differently - Grove Evangelist No 40 p 13

Bishop John Yates remarked in *To a Rebellious House* (the 1981 Partners in Mission report) "We're all in favour of change as long as it doesn't make any difference".

When vision is not shared by all, change is not just experienced as loss, but becomes threat as well. Then conflict and pain are never far away. The leader easily becomes seen as the focus of trouble. In an Anglican context that exudes not rocking the boat, values tolerance and is skilled in avoiding conflict, the leader can be made the scapegoat too. In a period of great stress, in 1995 he sensed God spoke saying "You can start again". On a Springboard mission in Eastbourne further renewal occurred. The process included the reminder not to push his own agenda nor contend for it. I remember meeting him only weeks later and seeing a transformed man. **The cost of being a harvester of new kinds of crops is huge**, especially when the existing church, whether diocese or parish, sets high store on support of familiar patterns. These pressures are not new. Jesus' mixed set of epigrams about fulfilling the law, yet also of **the need for new wineskins, reveal similar tensions**. The radical and the establishment clashed then and still do today.



Three crops from one Parish



The Cf-E loses its bottle?

Resolution

In this period, Kerry and Eunice met Cell church thinking and allied it to Network, or non-geographical church. It was for them a kairos moment. It was articulation of the best practice he had seen in the north. The high values on relationships, the expectation on accountable discipleship, the release of gifts and ministries, the framework of consistent outreach and risky dependence on the Spirit all resonated with them. Should the Family Service congregation transition to this set of values?

Within weeks it was clear that the idea of a **Network church, appearing to cross boundaries, was alarming local clergy. Cell was not the problem,** it was introducing Network and how this fitted with leading the overall work at Holy Trinity. Autumn 1997 saw visits to the Archbishop's staff meeting and conversations with its members, explaining and clarifying the vision. Concerned to fulfil his calling not to fight his corner Kerry came to the point of knowing he would resign if the idea for a Cell and Network congregation was refused. The way forward suggested was for him to resign as Vicar of Holy Trinity as of a set date, but to be re-licensed the next day, for five years to the Archbishop as a public preacher, as Senior Minister of Harvest New



Anglican church, a post of incumbent status. The new incumbent would be vicar of the Holy Trinity congregations and St Philips was promoted to being a parish.

A full set of guidelines for the leaders of HTM and Harvest were finalised in July 1998. The analogy used was of Harvest church being a mature church plant, or of a grown up child still living at home. By it Harvest was given a birth

certificate, a code of conduct and future expectations. Kerry was provided with stipend and housing. Identity difference and relationship were all nuanced. For the time being they would use the buildings for worship, but in time would move out. It is a clear, concise and thorough document and included setting up a reference group. Meeting quarterly it includes diocesan, local and national figures.

Writing this I am aware that readers with radical leanings will think the diocese careful to a fault. Those in the structures will sense the threat felt by other clergy, and be surprised at the innovative risk taken in this agreement. Such ambivalence probably stalked the Canterbury corridors. **That mix is where we are** and the story is told to show that **ways through can be found,** but they are not lightly bought.



Progress

September 1998 brought the launch of Harvest New Anglican Church by Richard Llewellyn the Bishop of Dover, with the Network church meeting at 11.00am in Holy Trinity. Still the waters did not run smooth. Sharing a building but set up to be different was not easy. Kerry sensed the need to move Harvest



out. The new incumbent was appointed in October but only stayed 6 months. In retrospect this may have been a necessary transition time, during which Harvest church did move from HTM to Northdown Primary School (pictured on previous page). Half the family service congregation came; 50 adults and 30 children in 8 Cell groups, those who related most strongly to the vision and the Thorpes. Threat among the local clergy receded. The fears of losing their best people, a cult starting on their doorstep and thinking the diocese weak-minded not to snuff out this aberration, were being calmed. February 1999 marked the second launch, at which John Pritchard preached.



Harvest are learning on the job about being Cell. **There are no shortcuts to learning the values**, which are more candid about personal change and growth than many realise. There can be no skimping on mentoring Cell leaders. In a way it is leader hungry, but **the rewards of changed lives are great and the span of care at all levels then remains effective**. Developing new leaders, reaching out to others through friendship groups, and facing our human internal barriers to growth are the constant needs. But a year later the church has grown to 64 adults and 42 children. 90% of the members are in cells which includes three groups for children and youth learning to reflect cell values.

Kerry has long worked as a Church Growth consultant and this shepherd counts sheep carefully. Of the 15 adults who have joined, there are 3 converts, 8 restored to faith after long lapses and 4 transfers, who had left their existing churches before making the switch. There are signs of some harvest; the network is catching some fish in the net.

A sense of healthy detachment from the sending church is achieved, good working relations exist with its next incumbent Arthur Houston, an inner sustained purpose is around and regular external monitoring by the reference group is in place. It is working for all concerned. I wait with interest to observe what fresh questions are posed and what creative solutions arise, when Harvest outgrows the school.

Why so different?

Whereas *Carpenter's Arms* had a surprisingly smooth passage, this venture has seemed to make waves and been hit by waves at every turn. Two factors strike me.

- Firstly **new incumbent has no track record of trust** to be built upon, when a Network church is considered. Network really worries traditional clergy. Locally in Deal I could act as steering wheel to Alan's accelerator, or as diplomat fronting his verve and ideas, but Kerry had no one locally who could offer that complementary ministry for him.
- Secondly **trying to transition an existing church is a more painful path than beginning a new one**. This is yet more true when a church contains existing diverse congregations. The traditional requirement that the Vicar validate everything by being at it, makes the transition endemically impossible, for Cell is supremely a way that empowers laity and makes Clergy into specialists in overall direction and lay leader support.

The pain for many has been immense; I am glad that a live birth has been the result. I wryly note that the original vision of 1993 for HTM is much of what has actually come to pass. There are three thriving churches, where once there was one holding together three diverging strands. **A harvest is being gathered in diverse ways.**

A hand on the tiller in Canterbury

The tales make clear that Diocesan initiative and practical commitment is integral. Archdeacon John Pritchard was appointed in 1996. Giving me several hours of his time, he underlined the importance of trust in the whole process. From his perspective, the trust built over years of my relationships in the deanery and diocese was the foundation upon which TCA Deal was built. Certainly this chimes in with those stories nationwide that have seen Network churches begin with a lesser sense of threat. **There are no short cuts to trust and establishing credibility.** Creating network churches needs patience.

The climate for these new ventures is still hostile.

- Resistance by the clergy is rooted in their training and practice to think as territorial beings. It is their parish. There is innate conservatism, made more plausible as offering security in a secular maelstrom of constant change.
- In clergy blood is a doctrine of place. Anglicanism seems built on sacred buildings - an expression of always being there, whether wanted at the moment or not.
- The 20th century has significantly undermined their confidence leading to insecurity of community role and the need to stave off a sense of failure. Some are simply hanging on until they retire. This is worsened by ageism in society and elderly clergy.

If those are their values and they are uncertain about the present and worried by the future, then **Network churches can look like their worst nightmare come true and living next door.** Their mentality associates them with the Old Testament period of the Temple. The notion of church as a moving Tabernacle makes them nervous.

Without Diocesan advocacy, accountability and appraisal, Network churches will feel like imperialist invasions. A steady hand on the tiller will be needed to steer these lively new craft. But with these safeguards here is the principled, responsible introduction of a much-needed *mixed economy* in mission. I am indebted to Archbishop Rowan Williams for that happy phrase, coming from his introduction to an analysis of mission needs and progress in his province, *Good News in Wales*.

But are these just eclectic churches by another name?

Readers are invited to fit their experience of churches into this grid. I have served in several: Suburban “Parish”, Town “Mixed”, Town “Eclectic” and I helped sent out a Town “Network” church - in that order.

Type	“Parish”	“Mixed”	“Eclectic”	“Network”
Drawing from	>90% parish	85-50% parish	55-95% beyond parish	No parish at all
				EXAMPLES
Rural	Classic village church	Shared churches and mobile people	Modern commuter “village”	<i>Fountain of Life:</i> Ashill near Swaffam
Town	A one parish town	Several parishes in one town	Distinctly held traditions in nearby parishes	<i>Carpenters Arms:</i> Deal <i>The Net:</i> Huddersfield <i>Harvest:</i> Thanet
Suburbs	Parish made of one contained area	Overlap: parish and neighbourhoods	Bible belt churches	<i>Oaktree:</i> Acton
City	Urban village or stable community	Overlap: parish and neighbourhoods	Centres of excellence	<i>Tommy's:</i> Nottingham

“Eclectic” used to be an Anglican swearword. Are Network churches different? Simply put, the difference is that they are **intentionally non boundary rather than indifferent to it.** They work with only a personal fringe. They have no history or sacred space to draw on. There is no Occasional Offices traffic. Their focus is the non churched and the dechurched - not winning back a historic fringe. **It is a genuinely different style for a different task.**

What is Anglican about Network churches?

All these are treated by the Diocese as fully Anglican. Their leadership is authorised and accountable to the Bishop both through Licence, and ministerial review. They are tied into diocesan family responsibilities in terms of finance, synodical representation and registers of services. In the age of Common Worship they make use of core texts. They value an instinct for theme and shape and are thus as liturgical as many other parish churches. They are visited by the Episcopal staff team, for Confirmations, to celebrate and preach. They believe they belong to the wider church and are not congregationalist in ecclesiology. **It is not buildings, but varied strands of belonging that makes them genuinely Anglican.**



A good hard Pew and think of Anglicanism.

Commonalities and conclusions

- 1 Canterbury is home to these network churches. Permission from the Diocese must take some credit.
- 2 Unconnected with the diocese, I am intrigued and alarmed that Kerry Thorpe and Alan Dodds both fell foul of ABM. With further Network church plant leaders saying the same, I suspect entrepreneurial leadership is insufficiently prized by our central selectors.
- 3 These examples are in towns - but hundreds of towns and suburbs across the country could have a Network church complementing parishes.
- 4 Network churches are founded to grow. All of these have bucked the national trend. But when they do outgrow their home, sharp relocation and polity questions raise their heads. We are not a national Church that copes well with growth.
- 5 Network churches are at the sharp end of learning how we win people through relationships. They have no other way to work, so they will acquire valuable honed instincts. They are likely to build on John Clarke's analysis of Web churches in *Evangelism that really works*.

- 6 Allied to this all three churches did not start as large as they would like. Here is a dilemma. The large network church could be lazy, enjoy its own company and try to live off its fat. The smaller one is in danger of fishing out its fringe very quickly and exhausting its members. The best size is still not clear.
- 7 Cell in the Canterbury stories is an emerging principle that will help. Truly holistic, truly mission minded cells is one ideal way to enable churches of differing start size to make their way through the catch 22 outlined above.
- 8 Not all Network churches use Cell. **Network defines the market in a new way**, which is the threat and opportunity bound up in it. **Cell is one strategy to reach that market** I want to explore other ways in a later edition of *Encounters on the Edge*. It is worth consulting Stuart Murray's *Church Planting* pp 138-155 for another overview of Seeker, Network and Cell.
- 9 All of them are explicit expression that Church is people not buildings, *"It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance what our Lord left behind Him was not a book nor a creed not a system nor a thought, nor a rule of life but a visible community. He committed the entire work of Salvation to that community. It was not that a community gathered around an idea so that the idea was primary and the community secondary, the actual community is primary, the understanding of what it is comes second."*
Lesslie Newbigin *The Household of God* 1953 p.4

Once more let's look to Canterbury and watch the see of Augustine demonstrate new models of mission for England. Twice in 1400 years is hardly excessive.

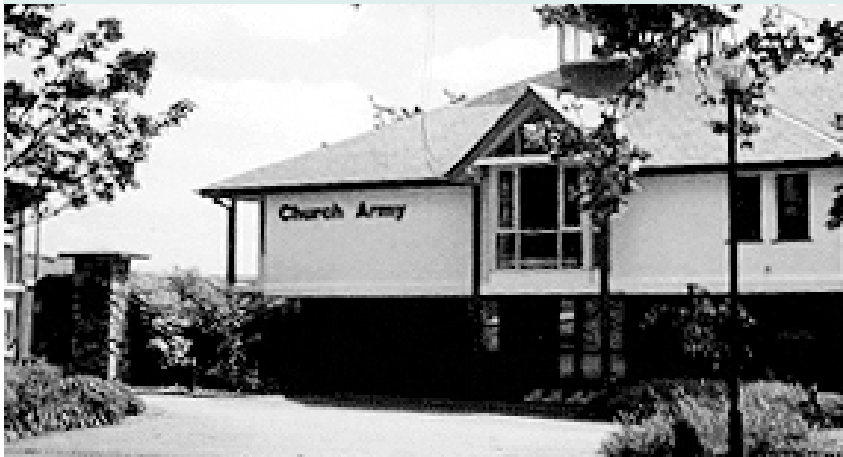
George W Lings, Director, *The Sheffield Centre*
Cartoons by Tim Sharp : *Deal Pentecost 2000*

What could you do now?

- Readers have used *Encounters on the Edge* in their house groups or their staff teams. Some regularly order multiple copies for that purpose.
- You might want further individual copies to send to others; these can be ordered from Claire Dalpra at our address.
- You might know a strategic contact to whom we should send a complimentary copy - please email, ring or write.
- This might be the first issue you've read. You may want to obtain the previous issues listed on the back cover. Individual copies are £3 each.
- In any case please get in touch, as we are here to help serve your mission needs.

The Sheffield Centre

- developing Church Planting & Evangelism



Our origins

In the early part of the 1990s, **Church Army** reviewed its strategy, the outcome of which was the seminal **'People to People'** strategy document, first published in 1993. The decision to establish the **Sheffield Centre** was spelt out in this document.

Our aim is:

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The Sheffield Centre has the following functions:

- **Research into church planting and evangelism.**
- **Extensive study and library facilities.**
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- **Specialist research, consultancy and publishing on Church Planting issues, the fruits of which are partly made available through *Encounters on the Edge*.**
*The Director: Revd George Lings
Research Assistant and PA: Claire Dalpra.*

Please contact us at the Sheffield Centre if we can be of assistance:

Phone: 0114 272 7451 **Fax:** 0114 279 5863

Email: g.lings@sheffieldcentre.org.uk
c.dalpra@sheffieldcentre.org.uk
d.booker@sheffieldcentre.org.uk
r.mills@sheffieldcentre.org.uk

Address: The Sheffield Centre, 50 Cavendish Street, Sheffield S3 7RZ

Together we are a team supporting the mission of the Church of England.