

Never on a Sunday?

Sunday attendance patterns have altered so much that the Church of England is changing the way it collects the figures. But what are none Sunday churches like?

George Lings went to visit some...

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ChurchArmy

Encounters on the Edge

A Series of Quarterly Investigations from

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ChurchArmy

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I never thought I'd see it . . .

As a person with German mother, first cousins and godmother, I grew up aware of some different patterns of Catholic Church life on the continent. I recall, as a newly converted teenager, being mentally dismissive of the development of the Saturday night Mass. At the time I interpreted it as lack of commitment, disrespect for Sunday, bowing down to the great god "leisure" and a general weakening of spiritual backbone in the face of secularisation - typical of nominal Catholicism where a convenient showing would exonerate the attendee from the demands of radical discipleship. Such is the unaware arrogance of youth.

It is therefore personally ironic that 30 years longer in the tooth, I sit down to write about the advantages of mid week church. I have become convinced that it is one of the developments I should welcome, as *Encounters on the Edge* continues to track what people are finding works and as part of discerning what are the growing edges of the evolving mission to the diverse cultures within the United Kingdom. Acute readers may pick up that this issue deals with a worship starting point in forming church, rather than by community building or a mission genesis. This probably fits with the majority of those who are helped by it – Christians, fringe and groups among the dechurched who can't make Sunday.

A number of sources have highlighted changing patterns in society and also shifts in the church landscape, both of which affect the use of Sunday. **In the past the combination of Sabbatarian influence, Christendom power and past social convention all ensured that Sunday remained a different day,** including dressing in Sunday best and consuming Sunday lunch. For many hundreds of years this joint influence (no pun on roast beef intended) has shorn up both Church on Sunday as a habit and Sunday existing for Church, as a feature of life. This high bank has now been eroded down to little more



The Sunday Joint

than a ridge on a cricket pitch, observed by a particular leisure group called Christians. In the most recent English Church census, *The Tide Is Running Out*, 51% of responding Anglican churches offer a mid week service. Across the denominations there is wide variation; only 19% of URC offer one, whereas 66% of Pentecostals do this. Maybe as many as 6.5% of church attenders only come mid week (pp 157-176).

This provokes a raft of questions.

- **Why is this change in patterns occurring?**
- **Is moving towards these factors laudable flexibility or cowardly compromise?**
- **What kinds of services are being created?**
- **Whom do they serve?**
- **Are these churches, or are they just feeders for Sunday congregations?**

I visited a few examples and we phoned some others.

Monday Church

I went to Todmorden on Monday May 14th (The Feast of Matthais) to be part of *The 4 o'clock Service*, also called a *Family Communion*. It had been mentioned to me, both as a notable example of a growing mid week church and also one with Anglo-Catholic influence. Brierley's work reveals those in the Anglo-Catholic tradition are the most prolific providers of mid week worship; 78% of their returns had a mid week service, compared to 30-50% among other traditions. This probably reflects adaptation of the practice of daily Mass.

Todmorden is a small Yorkshire town of 14000, at the head of Calderdale, in what was the West Riding. It is the mid point in a triangle of road and rail links between Halifax, Burnley and Rochdale. There has been a church on



the site of St Mary's for at least 500 years. This version sits above the T-junction at the heart of the town and opposite its

town hall. The present building is a fascinating historian's tale, with a late medieval tower, Georgian nave, late Victorian chancel and 1992 extension giving it a "lived-in" feel. Encountering it from the outside for the first time, there is momentary uncertainty whether it is an unusual church or intriguing municipal building.

If I have made the outside of the church sound curious or even quaint, there is no lack of conviction and no confused integrity, about experiencing it from within. Crossing enormous grave stones on which a welcome sign roosts, you enter what I can only call a wide, glass tunnel, running sideways from the main door to some further substantial glass doors within. On the one hand the draughts are kept out, but immediately the visitor visually encounters the whole of interior of the building. There is a delicious sense of surprise but also openness about what is disclosed. The building is carpeted, equipped with flexible seating set out for what I saw, in a v shape with central aisle and nave altar scheme. The altar was made by a firm of pub bar-fitters in Bradford and has something of the rugged realism which its origin suggests. I would not have been the slightest bit surprised to see crib figures of the holy family nestling beneath it. Notably, and



deliberately, there are only communion rails to the sides and there is a seamless blend of both open access to the chancel area, yet a sense of transcendence. To the north side, an extension houses displays, books, places to sit and access to further rooms. To the west end is a sizeable Georgian raked gallery. The whole area is sensitively and flexibly lit, including inspiring disclosure of the rough, hewn, oak beams claimed to be from local trees. **There is a sense of unity to the whole building; the architecture and the theology resonate.** Its people are proud of it and it is easy to pray there. I could easily imagine that this recent major reordering - reopened after four and half years work - cost £450,000, but I rejoice with the church that the money came in and some was given away to other causes.

I stress the building because it is far more than an envelope containing the letter of the Monday Service. It is both the set of the play that unfolds each Monday, but also expression of the history of local change that has enabled such new developments to take place. As with most things Anglican there is a history. In 1832 St Mary's was made both daughter church and redundant, at the opening of a larger grander Christ Church, which took its organ and pews. Thirty years of protest and petitioning led to the reopening of St Mary's in 1866. When Peter Calvert arrived to be Vicar in 1982, the two churches were being used on alternate weeks. As per Goldilocks, in the house of the 3 Bears, one church was too big and one too small, but finding what was "just right" was deuced difficult. One had dry rot and other roof problems. In 1987, the joint PCC met for a Eucharist, then kept a time of silent prayer, then voted. Peter counted the votes, announced the result and the PCC kept a further time of silent prayer before going home. They had voted 16-12 to close both churches but to redevelop St Mary's because of its more obvious position in the townscape. The sense of loss to both communities was painful but drew them together in common adversity. It was in this time of change that Peter Calvert asked the young mums who had some kind of link with the church, "*what you do want?*". Two requests began to solidify – "*something mid week after school*" and "*we want our communion*". The latter fitted naturally with the tradition of the parish, the former with the social pattern of their lives.

New starts with buildings often seem to be accompanied by the possibility of fresh uses. Following a September 1992 reopening, the first mid week communion for young mums and children began on a Wednesday later that Autumn. I guess there is little magical about the choice of mid weekday - Wednesday is no holier than Tuesday. The key is deliberately fitting with the social patterns and in 1994 the evident clash of priorities with other local events meant a move to Monday.

The 4 o'clock Service

It looks deceptively simple. When people begin to turn up there is more than the usual milling around the building. Tea, juice and biscuits are available from 3.30pm – the children need a break having come straight from school. Some children appear to be asking questions about whether they can assist in various ways. A few minutes before the kick off Peter Calvert appears, vested in alb and stole, moves to the middle of the chancel steps and sits down. Children of primary school age begin to gather round him. Mothers, grandparents and no less than 6 fathers remain in the chairs. There are 80-



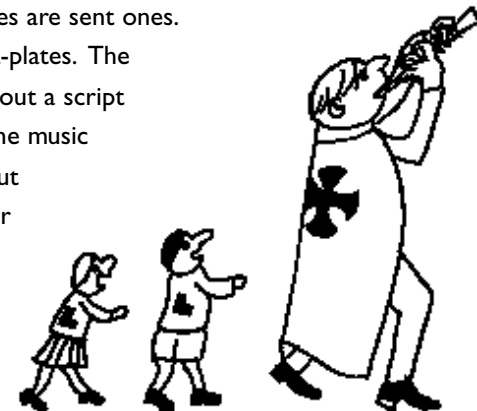
90 of all ages who have come out of possible pool of 150. Clearly Peter knows most, if not all, the children by name and they chat in informal fashion. It is as though some combination of favoured uncle and their favourite

storyteller has come to town. Shortly before four he simply says “Listen” and an uncanny quiet, for that grouping, quickly takes over. The bell is heard tolling 39 times and then it strikes four. He asks how many times it rang. Some have learnt the right answer - the 39 lashes of Jesus - but all are taken seriously.

“Hullo everybody” is the start of the welcome. Is this going to be the style - folksy, informal seaside beach mission stuff? He continues “or we can say it another way, the Lord be with you”. To my amazement the chorus rings back “and also with you”. There are no books and no OHP; the children actually know the service.

I turn to my neighbour on the next chair, find out she is called Julia, and ask, “how do they learn that?” She smiles – “They pick up the routine or the older ones teach the younger ones”. I begin to understand. Here is genuine belief - in liturgy as worship and education – and in creating dynamic cultural equivalence. I find out through the next 35 minutes that the two will dance hand in hand and I will be astonished at the naturalness, involvement and growing understanding engendered. In addition, **structure and spontaneity sit together throughout as familiar friends, comfortable in one another’s company and conversation.** An extemporary prayer does duty for the Collect for purity and then comes my next surprise. Peter turns to the pianist, a member of St Mary’s and a teacher at the school most of the children come from and asks, “What shall we sing?” Her choice happens to be *Who Put The Colours In The Rainbow?* but he genuinely didn’t know what the answer would be. Talk about vicars not having to be in control!

Still seated, with congregating kids around him, this pied piper brings the Ministry of the Word. From what they know of substitutes coming on in sport, the role of Matthias is teased out. Once more it is clear how much the children have already learnt from a steady curriculum. They know apostles are sent ones. Disciples are Christians with L-plates. The interactive narrative style without a script is like the common touch of the music hall stand up comic, but without any malice. As it happens Peter has always preferred to preach that way - even



when serving as one of the Queen's Chaplains. Thought on the Gospel passage goes in beforehand, but with this group it is a live show - and all preachers know about going on stage with children and animals! Towards the close there is distinct encouragement to the congregation to be like Matthias in telling others about Jesus and saying to our friends "come and try it". Let no one say this event has no outward or evangelistic dimension.

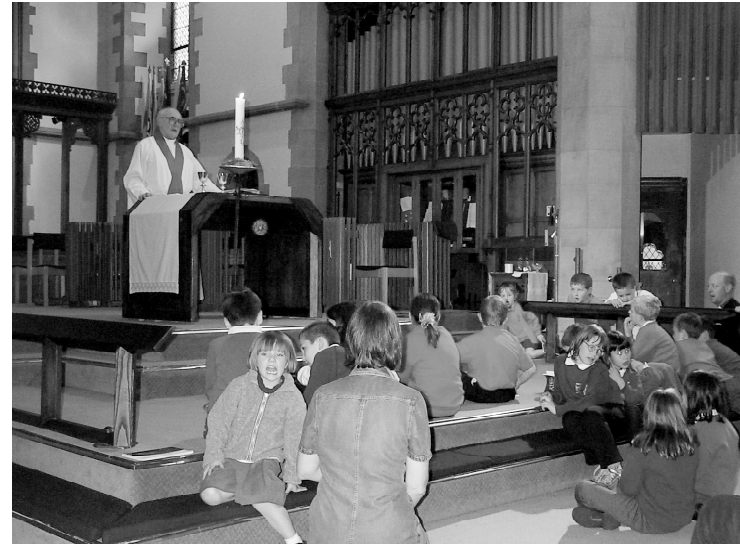
Interactive prayers follow. An 8-year-old child has brought a prayer of thanks that afternoon. Without rehearsal, and scarcely a vetting, the child offers the prayer. It is as natural and warming as "bring and show" in school. Peter Calvert then leads crisp extemporaneous prayers of Please and Sorry, followed by Absolution. A parishioner writing in the parish magazine *The Window* captured the openness, "Especially I like the sorry please and thank you prayers of what ever order the children choose". The Peace emanates next from the gathered group at the chancel step. Several children come up to me, a stranger, quite unabashed and unaffected, to pass the peace. They take the initiative and receive my "and also with you" with the solemnity and pleasure of confident youngsters.

Another song is selected in the live show style. During *Be Still And Know That I Am God*, the two children, who earlier asked to serve, come and acquit

themselves well as Peter takes westward position at the nave altar. The rest are already physically close - a

family gathered round the table. Common Worship Eucharistic prayer A flows and the bookless children are always on cue with the responses, enriching "Christ has died" with their own clenched

"and also with you"



hands stretched downwards, open and upwards to accompany "Christ has risen" and outward for "Christ will come again". As with the best actions to songs, **it's not merely keeping them busy, but letting their bodies teach their minds and feed their souls.** The invitation to reception is to the choice of God's blessing through bread and wine or the laying on of hands. All stream forward for standing reception, as well drilled as a Cathedral congregation, fanning outward without hesitation to two cup bearers on either side of Peter bearing the Ciborium.

A third spontaneous hymn - one of praise - is followed by a dynamic equivalence of the shorter post communion prayer but also picks up the concerns aired in the earlier intercessions. It is an elegant bow tying up the parcel of this offering of worship. The mood then changes and moves upbeat. We don't have "Notices"; rather it is "I have news for you". Next week's event and a reminder to be like Matthias follow. Then once more the extraordinary spell of the event is cast. The prayer of blessing is quietly prayed to the backdrop of profound silence, worthy of a 1662 eight o'clock. The dismissal acclamations are given and responses echo back. The seasonal "He is risen" is robustly returned with a crescendo of "Alleluia". To "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" comes the response the children invented "In the name of Christ, Amen. Home for tea!" It's over. It took 35 minutes. It has a magic and it works. Why?

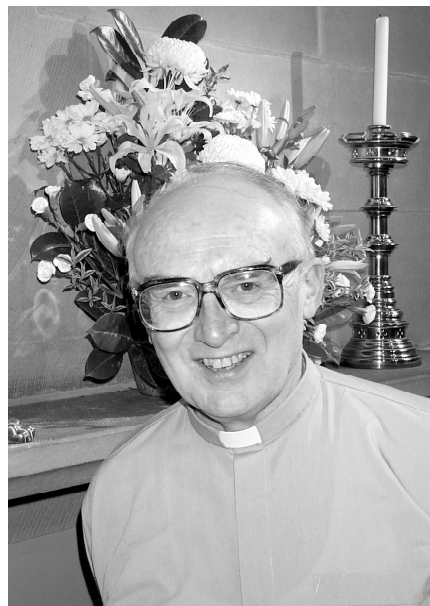
Why does it work?

The building enables a **style where access and transcendence coexist**. The congregation are participating in something they couldn't find in *Tesco*. It has atmosphere, which is more than what we do. While I am no longer convinced that society works largely through a sense of place and I believe that most urban people live their lives through networks, I am still convinced that we recognise holy places. The popularity of pilgrimage, retreats and increased visitors to Cathedrals suggests the same.

It works here because this church believes in communion as the act of worship. In this parish, children are prepared for confirmation at 9 or 10, but this lives with willingness to exist untidily with issues of communion before confirmation, in that the service itself is education towards understanding and commitment. It is another example of belonging making it possible to believe. **That Eucharistic conviction is in creative partnership with the constant search for encultured worship** and the two make a convincing, flexible alloy. In short, the worship has quality.

This event works because the **schools links are strong**, particularly to Todmorden CE Aided primary. Peter Calvert (*right*) takes many assemblies there and with lesser frequency in the four other schools of the parish. These are the sowing fields, in which relationship and trust is laid down, from which a visit to a church building becomes as natural as visiting a friend's house, and from which *The 4 o' Clock Service* can reap.

It would be dishonest to ignore the influence of Peter Calvert, but inaccurate to attribute its success only to his skills. I found him humble and warm, a pastor with the energy of a sheepdog rather than a shepherd, yet



believing that slow growth is best. Married with a family, children are in his blood. After University he had to decide between either an African adventure or teaching in Wakefield Grammar school - the latter won due to his health. He enthuses about *The 4 o' clock Service* as "*one of the best things that happened to me*". He admits it is exhausting, both in terms of the work but also from not knowing what is going to happen. However, its sheer fun and the response energise him. **Clearly he has a gift and calling**, and the form this service takes could not be convincing in the hands of all.

It also works because it has **touched a hitherto untapped seam of people who would not come on Sunday**. It has created its own fringe and those adults subsequently confirmed, still stick with it. Its accessible style also suits some newer Christians, much as past family services brought enlightenment to those bemused by Matins and adult sermons. Partners of believers can also come, even the men, and they comment "*we understand what you're on about*". We underestimate the complexity of our services and our communication at them. It has now been going long enough that some members who dropped off as young teenagers, have come back as young mums.

Why did they do it?

The story shows it was a response to a request. Beneath that enquiry Peter spoke of the changing social reality that Sunday is being filled with children's activities including sport, more people working on Sunday and visiting engendered by living with split families. He also volunteered that the full scale Communion on Sunday is daunting in terms of congregation size, the pressure to keep children quiet, the fear of being looked at if you don't and the inability to concentrate for longer.

The Todmorden communicant annual figures have risen from 4800 in 1982 to 15,500 in 2000. Sunday has around 140 present, but the varying mid week communions between them bring a further 100 communicants, a third of which are not coming on Sunday. Mid week services reflect both a change in attendance patterns and a changing devotional pattern of more frequent reception.

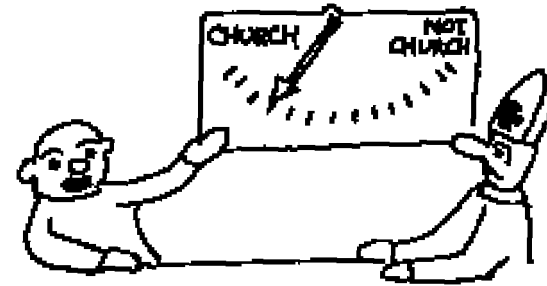
Is it Church?

I believe this question is not just of interest to those who prefer theological exactitude, or researchers like me who want to know whether to include it in data about Church Plants. **If it is just a service, then provision of that facility is completion of the goal. If however it is a church then wider questions about its content and development are proper and indeed necessary if it is to last and flourish.**

There are some factors that mitigate against it being seen as church. It meets only in school term time, also avoiding bank holidays and half term - because people are away. This makes it more like service provision than congregational identity. It has no form of indigenous leadership and no governmental representation on PCC, though I am confident the Vicar would be its advocate. It is called a service and because its major membership is children, it is tempting to revert to mental models of provision rather than participation.

However, when it does not run, the members do not come to anything else; for them it is church. Peter accepts this and though he needs the breaks, he is exercised that provision breaks down at that point. It is church in that there is **intentional expression of worship, mission and community**. The worship I have described. Mission was encouraged in the talk and is practised by the bringing of friends. I do not know what mission through giving occurs.

Community was palpable in the welcoming ethos, the warmth and ease of the Peace, the buzz afterwards and the way the building is their home. The community is mixed in gender and in age though there are gaps. It is an example of the maxim, from the Springboard booklet *There are answers* by Bob Jackson and Robert Warren p 5, that churches containing 75% or less of those under 45 flourish best. In addition, both sacraments are practised. In my experience, Communion crops up in many contexts, not all of which obviously signify being fully church, such as a house group. It is when there is Baptism that there is clearer indication that this group is functioning as a meaningful unit of the church to which individuals are being joined. Peter



“Where do we put it on the swingometer!”

Calvert himself described it to me without any prompt as a church plant. Fitting with that, there is no preconception that members will progress through to “proper” Sunday church. The Sunday congregation members are proud of it, and a team organise themselves to provide the refreshments and be the chalice bearers. These are gifts, across the family of churches in a parish, which expresses a welcome interdependence. I long that there should be some way for *The 4 o'clock Service* to reciprocate. On balance, it seems both fairer and more constructive to see it as emerging church.

For it to grow further as church, I wonder if it would be better styled *The 4 o'clock Congregation*, rather than service. The change of label would reflect its identity and purpose. Beyond that I would hope there would be some emerging indigenous leadership. This could be through parents and grandparents taking roles in planning and delivery. I also suspect the 10 and 11 years olds could offer forms of leadership. In school they may have positions of responsibility and church should not lag behind, by modelling passive dependency. Others like Ishmael, Alan Price CA, etc have shown the depth and spiritual power released through children’s ministries - both to their peers and to adults. It could be so here.

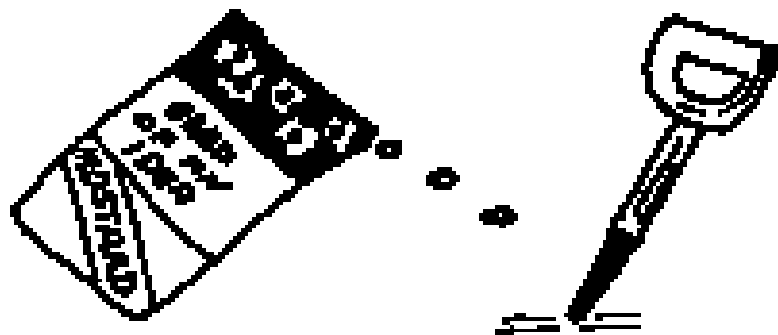
I liken *The 4 o'clock Service* on a Monday to one colour in an emerging rainbow. Rainbows are still an archetype of hope symbolising life in the sun beyond the experience of rain. I see this worshipping community as one hopeful expression of Church in Todmorden. Mid week Church is another

strand enabling us to realise that **the kind of Church which is emerging overall is a multi-layered diverse reality**. My present understanding is that less and less this means one expression of church using a variety of mission outlets. More and more, it means creating a variety of ways of being church - all of which are missionary worshipping communities and belonging to a greater whole. **Then Sunday monopoly is neither necessary nor even healthy.**

Small world!

Some weeks went by. July 16th saw me not in Todmorden, but in Morden, in south London visiting an adjoining area called St Helier. I wanted to see an event called *Kidzone*, happening after school on ... yes you guessed it, a Monday. Not only that, the idea came from the then vicar Gary Jenkins having talked with a friend, Simon Foulkes, who mentioned an event in Wakefield Diocese - in Todmorden.

I certainly don't think that Monday is magical nor do I think that the only way to do meaningful mid week church is after school with an emphasis on children. However, these examples and others, such as at Christ Church Winchester, do show it is one strand very worthwhile developing. All cite the similar societal reasons. However, I note that stories sow seeds. It is part of the reproductive power that exists in a church that is healthy. Todmorden did not send out St Helier, but the former's story helped make the latter possible. Stories help create what is thinkable, and what is thinkable becomes doable. *Encounters on the Edge* is intentionally a catalogue of mission seed packets that others may decide to plant.



What kind of context?

St Helier is a parish of 20,000. It is a monochrome estate of local authority housing built in the first half of the 1930's. All the roads are named after abbeyes. The first roads put in began with A and the last with W. It is blue collar, 98% white, and only 0.6% of the population go to the three Sunday services across the two Anglican churches.

St Peter's Church stone was laid in 1932. My first curacy was another St Peter's built in 1939. The style is distinctive. If I were being critical, St Peter's Helier can't quite make up its mind whether it is intended to be a thing of beauty. It has a lovely decorated ceiling, an organ with pretensions of grandeur, but also a noisy parquet floor, old style cathedral linked wooden chairs, white painted rounded arches covering concrete not stone and leaded lights without stained glass. Together they somehow convey the impression of an unconvincing roman catholic impersonation.



Getting going

Various factors propelled *Kidzone* into reality. The gardeners were assistant staff Revd Jon Westall and Paul Warren CA who had gifts with children. The soil is working with the parish's 10 schools and thorough baptism preparation that revealed interest and pleasant surprise at the Sunday 11.00am worship, but which was not turned into continuing attendance. When the seed came from Todmorden in July 99, Jon and Paul said "We must do something with this".

They planned in the Autumn, recruited a team including Dee Buchanan an ex nurse who does a wicked line in welcoming. Eight months later, Jo Phillingham,

a part time teacher and wife of a local church funded schools worker, joined the team (*right*). The format was based in interactive Bible story, songs the children would enjoy to backing tracks that made less demands on musicians, and fun and games through the quizzes and prizes. Deliberate comparison was made to high energy Saturday am TV. They launched in March 2000, following publicity at school assemblies and leaflets at the school gates. It runs in term time and is described as *The After School Service for Children*. For safety reasons they insist a parent or responsible adult must accompany children.



Where does it fit?

It isn't an after school club nor a baby sitting service. **It is intentionally a sowing strategy** and adults who show interest are invited to an afternoon home grown "Christianity course" using materials from St Matthias press combined with video clips from *Big Brother*, *The Simpsons*, *The Truman Show* and the *Jesus* video. A nurture course based on *Emmaeus* material follows and some whole groups go on to this stage, even though not all members have made professions of faith. Though the event was only begun in March 2000, already there are adults who have come to faith and who still come and bring their children. Another backdrop to *Kidzone* is the weekly toddler group which has explicit Christian content though there is no requirement for the members to be Christians already. This draws a number of women who wouldn't go to Sunday church. Whole families are baptised, adults come to confirmation and couples living together get married. I'd like to know how children who come to faith are nurtured.

Enter Kidzone

At 3.15pm, half an hour before the event, children and parents begin arriving and the tuck shop opens. Background taped music adds ambience. Children run about church in the large open spaces. The majority of children are 5-8 with a few year sixes. Paul, Jo and Jon serve at the counter of the tuck shop. This brings people naturally into contact with them; it is both good catch up and introduction time. I liked the way they model that **those who take leading parts at the front later, are those who serve behind the counter**. Nothing is formally made of that, but it is the dynamic of a serving, caring, Christian community quietly being lived out.



3.45pm and music familiar to the children starts off *Kidzone*. It sounded like *Thunderbirds* - and was. Children are sitting on closely clustered chairs, and the chancel steps. There are three presenters, a little reminiscent of *Blue Peter* and the style borrows at times from pantomime. Panto style,

as soon as the word *Kidzone* is used by a leader, the kids all shout back "*Kidzone*" in response. After an introductory song with vigorous actions, there is a quiz recapping the talk of the previous week. Lots of children want to answer the questions - because there is a bucket of prizes going round, but the recall of the story is impressive. Numbers on the day are good for the last week of term: 30 adults, 55 children. In the heart of winter a total of 100 is quite normal. **This is numerically the largest congregation in the parish.**

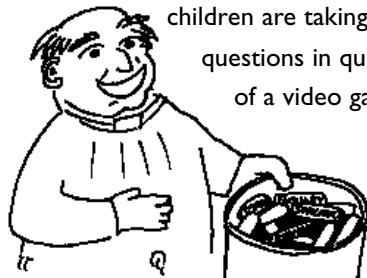
After another song, *Who's The King Of The Jungle* with exuberant actions, comes the centre piece, the sketch. Today is the story of the escape of Saul from Damascus. The style, pace and humour is beach mission without the sand. After a third song, there is a recap of the story and for right answers, kids are given vouchers from a bucket that they can redeem for sweets at the end of the event. The last song shows there is still some energy in *The Wise Man Built His House Upon The Rock*. The noise level is high throughout and powerful PA is needed by all presenters because the parquet floor creates a very resonate building. Prayer is brief before the hubbub rises again. 4.15 and kids stream to redeem their vouchers while leaders mill with parents and children.



How do the two experiences compare as church?

Both happen in an ecclesiastical building, both are led by ordained people, both have groups which congregate for the event. Todmorden is stronger on the ministry of the sacrament, though it includes a real place for the Word. It is also built on a sense of worship whereas the St Helier event is a kind of children's "Seeker Service". Taking some elements of family service, now perhaps regarded by many as too staid, they have created a higher energy version which is more presentational. It has a bit more multimedia than

"Family Service", but perhaps with less participation, in that no children are taking readings or prayers. Clearly they answer questions in quizzes, but it is more like the engagement of a video game, than being part of the show.



"Forget worship, community, and mission
the answer for church is... SWEETS"

Both are being faithful to the traditions they have inherited. Todmorden has a higher emphasis on belonging to the church and attending communion,

seen as the context in which one may discover Jesus. In St Helier, Jesus and the Bible are at the centre, so much so that church is hardly mentioned, and a *Kidzone* communion would never be contemplated, though in fairness adults who have come to faith, have been baptised or confirmed on a Sunday. Significantly, they would not be baptised at *Kidzone*. The practical reason given was that their families could not come on a Monday. I myself think if there was a sense in which *Kidzone* was more clearly seen as a form of church and as a congregation within the St Helier family, then the reception part of a baptism service might be held as a celebration of finding faith within the Monday event. It would be both a celebration of finding faith and a witness to this community that contains many still searching. As it is, the witness of people finding faith is actually denied to that congregation and it becomes only a feeder group, or early sowing strategy, for which the goal is still, even if unconsciously, incorporation into the Sunday congregation.

Both groups are in the curious position that though the events have quite a high sense of particular identity, the intention to build Christian community through them is not a focussed aim. In both cases, **when I asked "What is the intention to build Christian community through these events?"**, there was recognition that it was a right question to ask but that it hadn't been previously identified as needing attention. Neither venture has a dedicated pastoral care system, though the high frequency of Peter Calvert's forays into school is part of keeping in touch, and at *Kidzone*, a home visit over the summer is planned. By contrast, churches working with the Bill Wilson model of *Kidz Club* (*Grove Evangelism* booklet no 45) find the voluntary staff to make a weekly visit to each child.

I wonder to what extent the events are dependent upon particular skills with children, demonstrated by the current leaders. At St Peter's they write the sketches in three-week rotation and can handle the buzz of fronting this event. Such gifts are not that unusual, but they cannot necessarily be assumed in the character of a successor. Jon will only stay at most another two years and Paul three years. If *Kidzone* is to develop further, the new incumbent will have to give thought not only to replacement, but also to those who have the gifts and calling to work with children. In St Helier, local

people lack confidence to lead so finding indigenous leadership is a tough road. The Mums at *Kidzone* are not easily free to be part of the answer because they are collecting their children to bring them and then taking them home for tea.

Children and then?

Both groups illustrate the importance of the church re-engaging with children and the synergy that is to be found in improved contacts with local schools. While the latter is not new, the growth of after school church is a more recent development. It reflects the increasing inability of a “Sunday” to fulfil that previous connection. I think it also exposes that **“School” may have become the wrong thing to call Christian experience for children.** Sunday school - meaning literacy lessons from a Christian curriculum for 18th century children on the one day they didn’t work - is a far cry from where we are now.

Perhaps then, we should be less surprised at the collapse of Sunday school. Consider these figures of the percentage of the UK child population in Sunday school.

1900	1920	1940	1960	1980	2000
55%	48%	36%	24%	10%	4%

Source UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends No 2

In both stories, numbers of children involved has markedly risen. However, **the question will arise of what to do with those who turn eleven.** When they go into senior schools, these services in their present form will become kids stuff. It will not be many years before provision of appropriate youth follow-on and perhaps recruiting of staff to do that will become the key strategic question.

I have a curious feeling of having been here before and hearing the debate about whether a lasting church work can be built around a focus on children. History has a mixed verdict. It shows that child centred ministry does put down foundations that can help some dechurched people become returners later in life. It also shows others who become resistant, fixed in a view that religion is for children and the very old. In addition these patterns reveal that when children drop off in early teens, their accompanying parents cease

attending too. Those unconvinced by the child focus believe that unless at least one parent and in terms of role models preferably the father, comes to faith, a very high proportion of children who appear to welcome and embrace faith will put behind them childish things when they become teenagers. *Kidzone* are addressing this need to touch whole families by a conscious process to reach adults. Perhaps this evangelistic focus is what can be expected where a trained Church Army officer is involved.

For myself, I think that **only investing in children’s work, without trying to make culturally appropriate provision in youth work, is a very high risk strategy.** The practical difficulty is that a single local church which may be able to mount quite effective children’s work struggles either to have dedicated youth leaders or to find an additional salary in order to recruit a paid one.

What other mid week patterns are there?

Brierley reports on **“youth services”** on pp 162-171. 14% of his church respondents held a youth service, with average numbers of 43. He surmises that many of these are mid week, and anecdotal evidence suggests Thursday and Friday evenings. He notes that many older teens and students have jobs to supplement income and reduce loans. Many of these jobs in catering and entertainment sectors involve Sunday working. Here is not the place to argue the case for separate youth church - I have done so in *Encounters on the Edge* no 4 - only to note that this is another drift from Sunday.

Stephen Cottrell in *Transmission* summer 2000 tells a story that mirrors my own. He inherited a **Wednesday morning Eucharist**, drawing only 10. However, then it began to grow and some of them never came on Sunday. He confronted his own prejudices.

“While I was fighting a rearguard action to keep Sunday special, the Holy Spirit had danced ahead of me and was blessing Wednesday. Here without my properly realising it was a church plant...that not only provided a place for a new worshipping community to develop, but also had within it people who felt so comfortable and nourished...that they were getting on with evangelising their networks and bringing people to faith.”

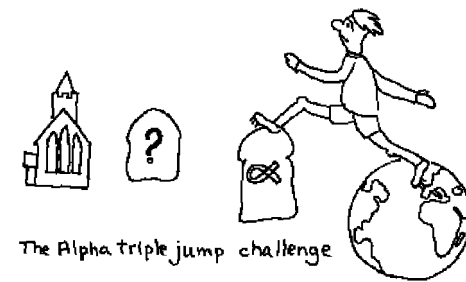
Having caught up with the dance, he put more resources into preaching, some singing and providing refreshments. Once a month they went to the vicarage for kind of nurturing house group. By the time he moved on, 10 had become 30, a third of whom never came on Sunday.

In Deal I found myself consistently nourished by the Wednesday 10.30 ASB Communion. To start with I felt it broke up my working week and I couldn't see the point, but its quality won me over. Laity took the readings and led moving, well-informed, spiritually stretching intercessions. In the extended melee that was the Peace the 20+ people warmly expressed their sense of community. Indeed it was a more coherent community than the Sunday of 180 people. This sense of identity flowed on during the refreshments afterwards. People would sit round tables and chat long afterwards. I did introduce a short talk that was appreciated and on high days and holidays we sang. The congregation was adult male and female, young and old. In particular it was sustenance for wives without their school age children, for whom family service with them was hard work and for church workers giving out in Sunday ministries like youth work, healing and music teams. Furthermore, it was everything to some spiritual singles whose pagan marriage partners wanted them around on a Sunday and to some elderly for whom Sunday was too full, too loud and too long. **For these people Wednesday was church.** Looking back I still value it and wish I had then had the wit to build on the community dimension and help it find more of a mission focus. It was worth both. Hindsight tends to reveal shortsight.

Another long established pattern is **lunchtime services** for teaching, apologetics and evangelism. Naturally these cluster around cities and business centres, but for some Christians in high-powered travelling jobs they may be more meaningful expressions of church than their home base versions. Home base versions often fail to connect with their working agendas and prevent the bringing of friends because network life means those who work together may live miles apart. I detect rumours of work based cells and these may be lifelines of accountability and practical discipleship for those in the world of work.

I also hear increased incidence where whole groups, that have come to

Christ via an *Alpha* course, find **the jump from Alpha to Church takes the leaping ability of Jonathan Edwards.** Consider the shift



from a food fuelled community life, a real chance of interactive learning and small group identity, into an alien world of coffee afterwards if you're lucky, talk from the front by a relative stranger, amidst people you don't know and may not want to know you - and you can understand the chasm. It also involves a shift to Sunday and that will be a problem to some, particularly those not used to or unable to organise their lives around Sunday church.

The Changing Sunday

Peter Cook is minister of Hereford Baptist Church. They had embarked on a multiple congregation model of church differentiating traditional and contemporary emphases. However, it wasn't working as well as they hoped and he wanted to explore why. His hypothesis throws up some different historical stages of church and different use of Sunday.

In agrarian society, work was open-ended and could be all day. Church was on the only day of rest, the only time available. People might have to spend significant time travelling slowly to church and all public church functions were expressed within Sunday. Outside that day, life was at home and family was the place of nurture and of mission. Third world rural church life can still be like this.

The industrial revolution spawned a world of skills as part of a wider process. Church life similarly proliferated with meetings for men, women and children. People lived in tighter areas and travel time was shorter. Church building centred Christianity flourished and they were used on many days of the week.

In Post-Industrial society, more work is moving both back to home and back out to the open ended, with people using evenings to keep up. Britain works longer hours than other European countries. More people travel longer

distances for work, not just to work. **Available time is shrinking again.** With more women at work, and more people tied to double income life styles, there is an affluence trap. So parents are under more pressure to use weekends to keep in touch with their children. Breakdown of marriage means more single parents who cannot go to evening meetings and children visiting the other parent at weekends - further time shrinkage. Mobility and career changes have decimated the extended family. At the same time, people are living longer and care for aged relatives may involve more travel over more years than in the past. It happens mainly at weekends. Mobility and choice also mean people are travelling longer distances to attend the church of their choice. Does that make it harder to sustain commitment? It is at least likely to decrease frequency of attendance.

Cook mentally divided his congregation into those who by and large had these pressures and those who didn't and did his sums. He then saw that none of the former came to the traditional service, few went to house groups and church meetings. Only 1/5th of the attenders in church were from this group, yet they were the ones with the most children and aged 20-40.

It is a scary analysis of why our patterns are not working and why **we see an exodus of people leaving church, which turns out to be less to do with loss of faith, and is called by some renegotiated commitment. In Anglo-Saxon that means going less.** Others identify it as the trend of believing without belonging. Cook's view suggests that for some Sunday will have to take on roles that we used to push to mid week. However, the factors he spells out also suggest we need to connect with the lives of people who could never go to church on a Sunday. For them it is never on a Sunday.

Freedom from Sunday constraints

John Drane in *The McDonaldization Of The Church* takes George Ritzer's analysis of the social patterns of the modernist iron cage and applies it to Church. Of the four characteristics - efficiency, calculability, predictability and control - it is the third by which the Church is most easily spotted. Sunday worship, especially when enforced by lifeless conducting of liturgies

written and unwritten tends to **predictable blandness.** Dominant groups make sure that their version of what is wanted predominates. It gives security to those who like predictability but will alienate others who need something



“would you like a side order of Church with your Big Mac?”

different and those who like experimentation and change. I believe Eddie Gibbs used to quip, *“More people are lost to the church through boredom than any other cause”* Now I am no longer a local church minister and therefore no longer have the same necessity of being there, **I realise that quite often congregational worship is boring and not rooted in people's everyday lives.** I suspect unless the overall experience of worship we offer has quality and connection, people will vote with their feet and have already begun to do so.

Monday Church in Todmorden and St Helier could not have taken place in their ways within the confines of the compromise that is worship by participants from a wide range of stages and ages. These are more child friendly and St Helier have found that those who have supposedly progressed from Monday to Sunday find the latter staid and constrained.

Flexible or Compromise?

Is the shift away from Sunday monopoly simply bowing to culture? Is it a cop out saying, *“make God fit your diary”*? My current view is that people with stressed and fractured lives are as much victims as creators of today's McDonaldized culture. A good proportion of them genuinely cannot make Sunday or if they do the conflicts erode the benefits. **They are not available and we need to travel to them. It is one equivalent of Jesus choosing to mix with the outcasts of his day.** If mid week church is to do its full work, then I long for it to be quality expression of Christian community, for that is the healing context that will be properly counter cultural and model relationships that work.

I don't say Sunday suits no one but we have a chance to think outside the box. What a relief for Sunday shattered ministers - to put some creativity into another day of the week.

Where could you go from here?

Strategically...

- If you are thinking of **starting a mid week congregation** use this issue together with No.9 to think through the proposed church style and the leadership resource implications.
- If you are a church with a **child centre congregation**, these stories will help your leadership team compare experiences. What might you want to communicate to your dioceses or the wider church as a result?
- If you have **connections within diocesan groups**, please think who else needs exposure to these kinds of questions and suggestions. How can these issues help us all get closer to good practice?

Practically...

- For whatever reason if you want **further copies**, those can be ordered from Claire Dalpra by note, phone or email - see *next page*.
- Is the **first issue you've read?** You may want to collect the previous issues listed on the back cover. All individual copies are £3.

About us...

In the early part of the 1990's **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, with the aim

- **To inspire and mobilise the Church in its task of evangelism.**

The Sheffield Centre has the following functions:

- **Research into church planting and evangelism**
- **Extensive study and library facilities through the Training College**
- **Specialist training in church planting and evangelism for those in full time Christian ministry**

The Sheffield Centre - developing Church Planting & Evangelism



The Sheffield Centre can offer the wider Church

- **Specialist research, consultancy and publishing on Church Planting, the fruits of which are made available through *Encounters on the Edge***

The Director: Revd George Lings.

Research Assistant and PA: Claire Dalpra

- **Practical hands on experience in Evangelism for young people through its Xchange, First Contact and Word on the Web initiatives**

National Youth Projects Co-ordinator: Captain David Booker

Evangelist with the Sheffield Centre: Alison Booker

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We are a team supporting the evolving mission of the Church of England.