



## Can the Church make a difference to communities living in the inner city?

The Eden Projects in Manchester are serious about transformation in the inner city. Significant progress seems to have eluded the church so far. Eden looks as though it has found some clues. How does it work and why? **George Lings investigates.**

Also available in the Encounters on the Edge series

- NO.1 LIVING PROOF - *A new way of being Church?*
- NO.2 UNIT 8 - *Out of sight, out of nothing*
- NO.3 CELL CHURCH - *Has Church reached its cell buy date?*
- NO.4 ETERNITY - *The beginning*
- NO.5 JOINING THE CLUB - *Or changing the rules?*
- NO.6 ACROSS THE POND - *Beyond control and security*
- NO.7 NEW CANTERBURY TALES - *Network Church Plants*
- NO.8 THAME OR WILD? - *Planting multiple congregations*
- NO.9 LEADING LIGHTS - *Who can lead new Churches?*
- NO.10 HARD GRAFT - *New life for a struggling Church*
- NO.11 NEVER ON A SUNDAY - *Midweek Church*
- NO.12 THE ENIGMA OF ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP
- NO.13 ENCOUNTERING EXILE



ChurchArmy

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

Tel: 0114 272 7451 Fax: 0114 279 5863

Email: [g.lings@sheffieldcentre.org.uk](mailto:g.lings@sheffieldcentre.org.uk)

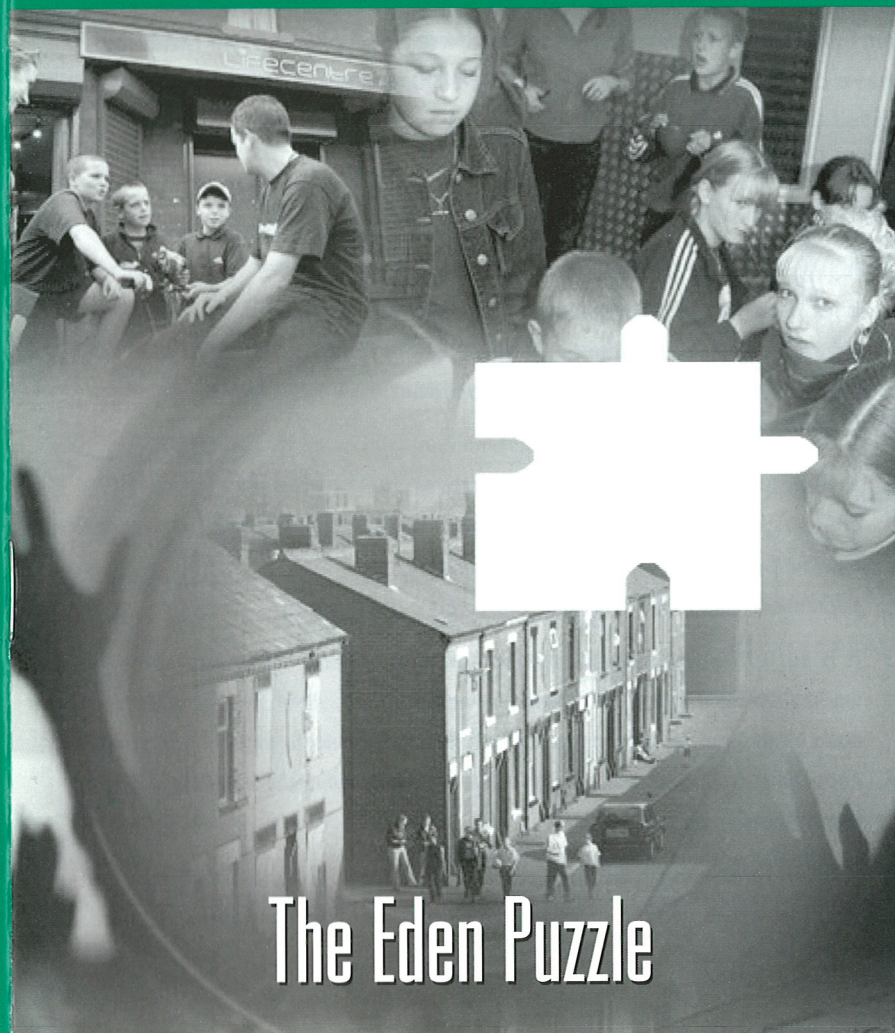


ChurchArmy

## Encounters on the Edge

A Series of Quarterly Investigations from The Sheffield Centre

No.14



## The Eden Puzzle

## Can the Church make a difference to communities living in the inner city?

19th century Anglo Catholics, the Salvation Army, and later the **Church Army**, certainly thought so. David Sheppard in his 1974 book *Built as a City* gave a London based historical outline of the church and the city. There were many missions and stories, heroes and heroines, lives changed and communities lifted. However the challenge of the inner city has if anything increased. **Since the second war, churches in the inner city have continued to struggle.** In July 2000 I received an honest document called *Change and Decay In All Around I See* written by a group of East Sheffield Clergy:

Welcome to the Church of St. Anywhere in Urban Land.

- 1 It is in decline.** It has known better days when it felt itself part of a developing community. Not any more. In ten years the parish has moved dramatically up the scale of urban deprivation.
- 2 It is small.** The joint congregation (there are two churches) of 40 represents less than half of one percent of the total parish population. And most of those are over 60 and female.
- 3 It is suffering from an identity crisis.** The patterns of Ministry, which worked well in the past don't work as well anymore. As a consequence the church has become inward looking and feels powerless to face all the changes happening around it. It is enough to survive. In playing the 'victim' it becomes reactive, defensive and insular.
- 4 It lacks leadership.** Getting people to take responsibility for anything other than the menial and the practical poses problems. The more obviously gifted



"oh, dear - I just dropped my church"

and more imaginative members have already 'abandoned ship' and gone elsewhere.

- 5 It is in financial difficulty.** The majority of church members exist on State Benefits. As little as £7 more or less in the collection makes an enormous difference to the ability to budget.
- 6 It is into 'service provision',** i.e. doing things for other people. The annual Housebound Concert is a huge success, and that is right and good. But does anything change as a result?
- 7 It is not connected with the wider community.** The Occasional Offices (Baptisms etc.) are often the only real point of contact. But the sheer number of them in larger parishes makes meaningful follow up unrealistic. The gap between church and community grows ever wider.
- 8 The buildings are inadequate** for the purposes for which they are required by both church and community. The designs are outdated and need alteration.
- 9 It is locked into 'maintenance mode',** i.e. trying vainly to preserve what there is in the way that it was. Maintaining and repairing the buildings and paying the bills, including quota, creates a cycle of despair which all but obliterates what we actually exist for as church.
- 10 The leadership that exists, (ordained and lay) finds itself overworked,** overwhelmed, drained of energy and forced into a reactive response to the job.

And so we battle on. But for how much longer? There is a crisis here which everyone is reluctant to acknowledge. It is patently obvious that existing patterns for doing things don't work anymore. They are breaking down under the strain. Would it not be fairer to all concerned if we could admit that we have failed corporately to deal adequately with the issues raised by this situation? Ecclesiastes declares that "There is a time to be born and a time to die". Nothing new can come from this unless we are prepared to embrace death, perhaps then the truth would set us free to be different and do something new? GRAHAM CREASEY MIKE FUDGER JOHN STRIDE: 2000



"I'm waiting for resurrection"

I have quoted from it fully, to try to give to readers who are not from areas like this some sense of the grinding attrition involved. The paper went on to positively explore faith working from brokenness and also a call to a combination of community and spirituality the writers called “monastic solidarity”. It is a curiously apt term for how the later story will unfold.

### Signs of hope

At the same time we have seen the influence of *Faith in the City*, the growth of partnerships between churches and regeneration agencies and inner city church plants. The latter has not been the preserve of Anglicans alone, but it is probably the case that because of the parish ideal, Anglicans have been the most widely resistant to withdrawal from the inner cities. From the late 1970's, 375 Anglican church plants have been started. 50 were in designated Urban Priority Areas (UPA), 31 were in inner urban areas, and 47 were on Local Authority Estates that share some of the problems but with lower deprivation scores.

## A conflict between need and resources

People have reflected on the effects of different sized church plant teams. In the UPA's, previous thinking had come up with a Church Planting dilemma. There are conflicting priorities presented by the dynamics of the mission resource and the mission context.

### Big is best

One strand of planting orthodoxy states that for effective church planting you need as much people resource as possible. **Critical mass helps provide the breakthrough.** This is especially the case when the planting method chosen is the provision of a fresh venue for public worship, as size of attendance counts towards credibility. When the style of worship is more creative and participative, this further underlines the need for enough members who can spread that load without burn out to the core leaders. In addition, a larger number of people sent on a plant could be expected to have more contacts between them, or the capacity to make fresh ones, in the planted area. Thus some planting authors made taking 50 people the minimum for plants to thrive.

### “Oh no it isn't”

The dynamics of cross-cultural mission contradict this, especially when the incomers move to places down an economic or educational scale. To start with, **a large professional or middle class team in a needy area will be in grave danger of being seen as a culturally foreign invasion or a hostile takeover.** Next the team may by act, or impression, patronise the indigenous people. Then reactions repudiating them in language of “do gooders” or “we don't want charity” surface and fester. Some lead to an equivalent of organ transplant rejection.

Some dangers may take longer to emerge. Some cultural studies suggest that when two different cultures meet there is a tendency for the more affluent, or more educated, to dominate. This applies to the choices about styles of worship, decision making, evangelism and ways in which community forms. **The articulate, cerebral, planned, nuanced and sophisticated may squeeze out the anecdotal, intuitive, spontaneous, simple and raw.** The new Church is then in severe danger of being only an imposed form.



“Why don't they want our help”

It is also extremely likely that such a process colludes with the dependency culture that can be the downside of state provision and the benefits system. The result is that the new UPA church perpetuates dependency on external leaders and key members. **Its people are prevented from discovering both indigenous leadership and indigenous church within their culture.** It is not surprising that such a church can neither connect deeply with the surrounding people, nor grow to maturity and multiplication, or survive the later withdrawal of external resources. Then rumour and accusation is bred of failure; the locals may talk with anger about being experimented upon and then abandoned. The wider church may accuse the

incomers of hit and run tactics and those who came, stagger away saddened and bewildered that their imported wisdom was rejected.

Furthermore, in the last ten years it has become clearer from observation of the results of decades of intervention by the State that throwing money at a problem only offers short term, or even cosmetic solutions. The clearance of old communities and building of new estates may even have created more problems than they solved. In Sheffield, during the five years I have lived here, the widespread demolition of those forms of housing from the late 1960's and early 1970's is eloquent witness to this charge. However, present forms of local consultation and partnership appear to be far more deeply consensual and the issues of lasting transformation and sustainability are being pursued with greater vigour.

### So on balance . . .

On the basis that usually it is better to let the mission task determine the mission resources, **the previous resolution of this conflict has been to teach that the wider the cultural gulf to cross, the smaller the size of the planting team should be.** A well known example is those who went with Bob and Mary Hopkins to St Helen's Lancashire in 1983 and is told in *Grove Evangelism Booklet No 8* pages 12-17. There Bob likens the highly talented, multi-disciplinary, small team to the arrival of a wind blown seed. Though small in size, a seed contains within it vast potential for growth when planted and nurtured.

A theological base for this orthopraxy was the Incarnation, demonstrating ideally the inverse relationship between width of missionary gap and mission resource deployed. **When God sent himself to the world he opted for one baby.** Not only was the resource small and vulnerable but the time frame before mission effectiveness was demonstrated was long. So sending small resources was justified.

I was therefore very intrigued to hear of work done by large teams on deprived estates in Manchester. This completely contradicted the conclusion we arrived at about how to plant in UPAs.

## The Eden Surprise

*Eden* was itself a surprise to its founders. Andy Hawthorne is the pioneer of the *World Wide Message Tribe* (now just called *The Tribe* and its parent body *The Message*). This group, specialising in dance music, has built a fine reputation for schools work with youth in the Manchester area. Andy is a Mancunian with the



passion of a rabid United supporter, but for spiritual promotion in the City. His own story and passion come out in his book *Mad for Jesus*. With racy style he covers his call and vision linked to Isaiah 43 and its image of streams in the desert. He notes inner Manchester as a desert

because it has never known a period of revival and 80% of the Christians live in the suburbs, where 20% of the people are. *The Tribe* was one way to connect with a younger generation growing up ignorant of Christianity.

In 1997, as a recruiting video from last year tells, a schools mission in Wythenshawe led to around 100 young people "committing their lives to Jesus". Surprisingly they turned up at the local church, but despite its efforts aided by *The Tribe*, that church was unable to disciple them and the vast majority fell away. As Andy Hawthorne puts it, "*It did our heads in, so we went away and came up with this dream of something called Eden*". **What in effect was a failure was the seedbed for a better way.**

The idea was to form partnerships with a local church on an estate and to move in teams working at two levels. The first tier is 4 full time paid schools workers. They work in youth clubs, detached youth work, schools and with the *Eden Bus Project*. The second tier are up to 30 younger adults with secular jobs, working for *Eden* and the local church in a voluntary capacity, who would both disciple youth converts and be an incarnational presence on the estate. **Both groups, by definition, move to and live on the estates where they work.**

The *Eden* values are palpably evangelistic but they are also equally passionate about practical holiness. Mark Smethurst was the leader of the first team and remarks on the video, “*The most important job that every Eden worker has is to live a godly life in these tough areas to see the atmosphere change and God’s Kingdom come*”.

### Over half way

The dream is for 10 *Eden* Projects on Manchester inner city estates, with 300 workers living long term as salt and light in their communities, working in conjunction with local churches or where the church is notably weak to bring in a partner church plant. 10 estates have been identified, 6 projects are running and 2 more are planned for the Autumn of 2002.

Estate	Side of City	Start	Leader	Full time	Team	Church Link	Special Features
Wythenshawe	South	1997 Sept	Mark Smethurst	8 (including 4 year-out volunteers focussing on sports ministry)	25	Kings Church	Now 120
Salford	North West	1999 West	Carl Belcher Sept	3.5	15	ex Brethren	Challenge to integrate youth into church
Longsight	South East	2000 August	Dan Leaver	2.5	24	New Frontiers	
Openshaw	East	2000 August	Gary Bishop	4	20	Salvation Army	Church Plant
Harpurhey	North East	2001 Sept	Ian Henderson	4	13	Christ Church C of E	
Swinton West	North Nov	2000	Hayden Brophy	3	9	New Frontiers & Smaller estate	Church Plant of 25
Hattersley	East	2002 Sept	Sharon Murphy	1		FIEC	Church Plant
Failssworth	North East	2002 Sept				AOG	Church Plant graft as rescue



In addition there is their bus, complete with a leader, John Robinson and a small team. The bus is kitted out in funky style with music and computer games and tours the projects, one per night. Its mobility brings a scarcity value and makes its resource less prone to

vandalism. Because it is deployable it is a flexible resource for detached youth work and can spend more time at particular projects if required. It brings church out to the community and connects with one of the most readily perceived needs in the community - something for youth to do.

## Strands from the Swinton Story

Each *Eden* project has its own history. They are like family members displaying individuality and commonality. One story may take readers into many of the dynamics but it is no blueprint for all the others. I am glad that *Shaftesbury Society* are writing up the Life Centre in Salford and I hope the comparisons will throw more light on this potentially significant breakthrough on inner city estates. I tell the Swinton story because, when I asked to visit *Eden*, it was the one I was shown.

### The unusual birth

*Eden Swinton* was born out of *Message 2000*, two consecutive weeks in the summer at each of which around five to six thousand Christian young people, linked to Soul Survivor, camped in a Manchester park. They received mornings of worship and teaching. In the afternoons some took on types of street evangelism and others a variety of acts of service to local communities. Evenings were evangelistic celebrations, at the Manchester Evening News Arena, for those that they had come into contact with during the week. *Message 2000* is written up in snapshot, story and comment form by Soul Survivor under the title *The Urban Adventure*.

The run up to the summer event showed that about 1000 more young people per week were intending to come than had been planned for. The