



Addicted to Planting?

How do people in recovery from addiction become disciples? What would a church plant of recovering drug addicts and alcoholics look like? Is Alcoholics Anonymous a model of emerging church for the 21st century? Claire Dalpra, assistant to George Lings, investigates.

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ChurchArmy

Encounters on the Edge

A Series of Quarterly Investigations from **The Sheffield Centre**

No.17



ChurchArmy

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Prophecy?

In 1961, C. Hobart Mowbray suggested that *Alcoholics Anonymous* should be the blueprint of emerging church for the 21st Century. In his book *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion* (Van Nostrand p.46), he wrote, “...**Alcoholics Anonymous provides our best present intimation of things to come**”. This sort of statement cannot be left uninvestigated by *The Sheffield Centre* as we research emerging expressions of church in the UK that are crossing the widening gap to those outside church. How remarkable that a statement like this was made over 40 years ago. What is it about A.A. that prompted Mowbray to suggest this? Over 40 years later, is his recommendation still relevant?

How are we doing with our alcoholics and drug addicts? Time spent trawling through Department of Health statistics available on the Internet (UK: www.doh.gov.uk U.S.A: www.samhsa.gov) shows alcohol and drug addiction affects a sizeable section of society and that this group shows no signs of diminishing. Surely they qualify for this series *Encounters on the Edge* in more ways than one; they are a group on the edge of coping with life and, despite the growing awareness of addiction in society, they are on the edge of our “normal” churches. Claire Dalpra works as Research Assistant at *The Sheffield Centre*. In March 2003, she visited a Christian community in a town called Branson in the USA that has left her convinced they have something valuable to teach us as we increasingly grapple with the question “what is Church?”.

Isn't the US mission context different from the UK?

Die-hard fans of our *Encounters on the Edge* series will know that we always caution the use of imported models; Church planters should look first at the particularities of their mission context and match the models to the mission task.

The United States appears to stand alone from other English-speaking Western countries - Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada - that have over the past three to four decades all suffered a steady erosion in attendance that threatens their future. Many agree the US is a Christian nation although church attendance statistics question for how much longer. Furthermore, the US does not have a state church and “nowhere else in the Western World do Evangelicals have to be right-wing republicans or the equivalent to be considered born-again Christians.” (Tom Sine *Mustard Seed Versus McWorld Monarch* 1999 p.187). There are many notable examples of good work with addicts here in this country. Why, then, are we taking a story from the US to inform churches in the UK?

Ultimately, this is too good a story, with too many transferable principles, not to tell. Furthermore, the ecclesiastical backdrop of the American Episcopal Church in the US is such that it illustrates in sharp relief the enormous gulf that can exist between church culture in pastoral mode and the church in mission to people groups such as recovering addicts. **If a very different way of being church can be started in a society still confident about traditional church, then we need to hear about it.** Furthermore, the Episcopal Church in the US has developed a reputation for largely ministering to middle-class, middle-aged, classical music lovers who enjoy drinking socially. The light bulb joke is as follows:

Question: “How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb?”

Answer: “Two – one to phone the electrician and one to mix the martinis.”



How does an emerging church working with recovering alcoholics cope in an Episcopal setting?

Branson

Branson is a town of 6,700 residents in southern Missouri, ten miles from the Arkansas border. It has alongside it the town of Holister with an additional 5,000 residents.



Branson is not your average town. From March through to December in 2002 it received 8.1 million visitors staying in motels, time-share apartments and camping groups. The attraction is the musical entertainment; Branson has more theatre seats than

New York. The 100 shows listed in the 2003 guide include *The Andy Williams Christmas Show*, *Jimmy Osmond's American Jukebox* and *Dixie Stampede Dinner and Show* (inspired and produced by Dolly Parton). The crowning glory of Branson is the *Silver Dollar City*. In 2001, this 1880's theme park was voted **the no.1 theme park in the World above DisneyWorld** for its quality of family entertainment, crafts and countryside. Branson has also hosted the Miss USA Pageant 2 years running. Despite these impressive accolades, Branson is aware that it caters to an older clientele. The town developers are exploring ideas for attracting younger visitors.

While the mid-west is not as progressive as either the east or west coast of the United States, the popularity of Branson's entertainment is that it is family-orientated. There are no casinos and all shows are wholesome in subject matter and free of bad language. Quite impressively, most shows have some Christian content. Unfortunately, another draw to Branson might be its white supremacy; we saw very few African Americans or Hispanics. The headquarters of the *Kul Klux Klan* are not far from Branson. Following 9/11, the number of visitors to Branson has actually increased. Like a mother hen guarding her chicks, many extended families chose to holiday together and nobody wanted put their entire family on an airplane.

In 1993, a current affairs programme called *60 Minutes* called Branson the "richest little town in America" and said it was possible to make a million



dollars in 6 months living there. Airing at 7pm Sunday primetime, Branson was then inundated with people living on a dream as a result. Like a mini gold-rush, people were dropped by relatives on the side of the street

with suitcases. I was told that idealistic Americans can be naïve at times; if someone expresses a wish to pursue a dream or an idea, fellow Americans will pat them on the back and encourage them to "go for it" even if the dream is impractical or unsuited to the person's character and skill. (By contrast, it could be said that Brits tend to instinctively point out all the reasons why someone shouldn't follow their dreams!) A handful of talented entrepreneurs *have* made a lot of money in Branson but they are the exception and not the rule. There were not the money-making jobs and opportunities that were promised. By 1995, the camping grounds were packed out with people with little money and shattered dreams.

Church Army USA

Branson could be called the "belly button" of the "Baptist Bible Belt". The *Southern Baptists* are the largest denomination in the area. *Assemblies of God* are the second largest; their international headquarters are located in Springfield nearby. The American Episcopal Church have 52 parishes in the Diocese of West Missouri. The *Shepherd of the Hills* Episcopal Church, began sometime in the 50's or 60's, is one of these parishes. It is the only Episcopal Church in Branson and Holister.

Church Army USA is much smaller than its UK counterpart; there are only 10 active officers and three in training. All officers are responsible for raising financial support for themselves. No USA officer works in a parish

structure. Steve Brightwell, Director of Church Army USA laid the groundwork for a Church Army Officer to work under the license of the Bishop of West Missouri to work informally with *Shepherd of the Hills* Episcopal Church “to proclaim the gospel to the least, the last, and the lost and to draw them into the life and mission of the church”, the mandate of Church Army USA.

Capt. Tim Scheuer



Capt. Tim Scheuer of Church Army Australia, with his wife Jenny (left) and four children, came to Branson in 1995. Tim was born and raised in Ohio, USA, the youngest of 6 in a family of nominal Roman Catholicism and hard drinking. Growing up, he got involved in drinking and drugging and only

realized, while in the Forces, he had a serious problem. Through the conversion of his Uncle, Tim had heard about Jesus. While in the US Army, through a one-off encounter with a Christian hairdresser (from an alcoholic family also), Tim became a Christian.

In 1982, Tim left the Army to visit Israel but with no flights available, he ended up in Australia. Staying in a Sydney youth hostel in a red light district with young adults from all over the world, Tim “backslid with abandon”.

However, one weekend camped out in the Katoomba mountains, Tim discovered a christian coffee house and the Browning family. Keith and his wife ran *Kihilla Convention Centre*, a significant centre in the early days of charismatic renewal in Australia. **The welcome and acceptance Tim received from Keith was unconditional.** Keith saw potential in Tim as a son-in-law and allowed him to marry his daughter Jenny. As a newly married couple, Tim and Jenny attended a YWAM *Discipleship Training School* which gave them training in outreach evangelism and cross cultural mission. They returned the following year as leaders adhering to the YWAM principle of “giving away to others what you have received yourselves”.

While piloting a new YWAM scheme in Sydney for longer-term mission opportunities, Tim heard the Church Army College Principal preach. It was the most challenging sermon and the nearest thing to YWAM teaching he had heard in an Anglican setting. **Attracted by the transformation over time in people’s lives through the work of Church Army,** Tim began training in January of 1988. However, on completion of training, Tim and Jenny worked in churches unable and unwilling to handle the changes that the fruits of their evangelism were bringing about. In the consequent decrease of confidence in the institutional church, the values they saw being expressed in the Cell Church movement were the ones they wanted to invest in. In March 1995, Tim and Jenny came to Branson to establish a base of Church Army work amongst the most deprived, using cell values.

The Working Poor in Branson

The “working poor” is a Government term used to describe a section of the population with no health care, no decent house or car, no savings and no holidays. Unemployment benefit in the US is only available for a limited period of months so people have to find



work. With the motels, restaurants and shows, **Branson has generated and attracted many people falling in the category “working poor”.**

Low paid jobs as dishwashers, timeshare telesales and hotel cleaners are in abundance for 10 months of the year; there is 40% unemployment in off-season. Alongside the lack of healthcare, the big issue for this group of people is alcohol and substance abuse. People can work for two weeks, go on a three or four day binge and know they will be able to find work after.

Branson is known as the **Methamphetamine capital of the United States.** A drug awareness leaflet reads: “a new purer version of the substance is sweeping the Midwest and Missouri...Methamphetamine, known on the street as meth, crank, speed, ice or crystal is one of the nation’s most dangerous and lethal illicit drugs. It can be smoked, snorted, swallowed or injected; is almost instantly addicting.

The high is more intense and lasts much longer than most illicit drugs, but the fall afterward is also much harder and deeper. It can be made with a skillet and stove, in a motel bathroom, even in a car's trunk with a plastic drinking cup."

The other categories of poor in Branson include what I have termed the "disabled poor" and the "mountain poor". The "disabled poor" are people physically handicapped in some way and are able to permanently draw a disability allowance that prevents them from having to find work. The "mountain poor" or "hillbillies" are those that live a gypsy-like existence in the hills. **Tim said he did not and does not help people indiscriminately; their priority is helping people who want the possibility of transformation.** The "disabled poor" and "mountain poor" have in common a self-sufficiency that many of the "working poor" do not have. While all these groups could be called spiritually poor from having little or no contact with church, **the external circumstances of the "working poor" help them see their internal poverty.** The "working poor" show signs of being aware of their helplessness; they want to get their lives together and move on to better things. Tim and Jenny were wise to target this group. Anyone involved in mission in the UK would do well to ask who are the people in their area that *know* they are helpless and are sick and tired of being sick and tired.

What kind of De-churched?

People leave church for a variety of reasons¹. Some would not come back because of the pain, disillusion, disappointment, injury or insult. We call this latter group the "closed de-churched". As the stories that follow prove, the "working poor" of Branson seem to be mostly "de-churched"; many attended Sunday school or church as a child. I want to suggest that they fall into the category of "closed de-churched" but question who is it that is "closed". I suspect it is the church that has been closed to them. Subliminally, they received the message that not behaving in a correct fashion i.e. wearing the right clothes, being able to work through their addiction has left them over the edges of church life.

¹ See *Encounters on the Edge no.1 Living Proof p.12-14*

Church Army Branson

Alcoholics Anonymous, or A.A. for short, originated in the United States with Bill Wilson who, following a spiritual awakening, managed to remain sober by attending Oxford religious Groups (began by Frank Buchman in the 1920's) and following their precepts. However, he was not effective in seeing fellow alcoholics recover until he discovered the basis of the A.A. programme, that it is the mutual relationship of one problem drinker helping another that ensures sobriety. 12-step material was published because it was the only thing they found that worked.

The only treatment centre in Branson is the *Larry Simmering Recovery Centre*. It does not provide medical detoxification, just absence from substances for 28 days. While in recovery, staff use 12-step material from A.A. but concentrate their workshops almost entirely on the first three steps. While this may be effective for hard drinkers, it does not work for those who are truly alcoholic, who are unable to stop despite the myriad of good reasons to do so. **The 12 steps are unashamedly and quite startlingly based on Biblical teaching.** Even in the US, it is not popular to talk about God in A.A. and in the last 40 years "psycho-babble" has been interwoven into AA material to dilute its message, but this lowers its effectiveness; it may work for the hard drinker but not for the true alcoholic.

Way Out Workshop

Church Army Branson mounted its first 12-step workshop which they called the *Way Out Workshop* in February of 1998. In this workshop the steps were taught in their original form. By the second workshop in May of that year, through relationship with a key member of staff at the *Larry Simmering Recovery Centre*, they were given permission to hold the workshop at the Centre thus exposing them to a greater number of addicts wanting to learn about the steps in their true form. Workshops now run every month. Staff changes at the Centre have meant that the *Way Out Workshop* has had to move back to the *Church Army Branson* offices; the new staff are suspicious of 12-step orthodoxy and prefer to control how the 12 steps are taught on



their own premises. Nevertheless, they allow the *Way Out Workshop* (above) to be advertised in the Centre and people are bused in to attend. Parole officers also advertise the workshop. The workshop I attended had 32 people. Half had been on a *Way Out Workshop* before and were either hungry to hear its content a second time or there to support the people doing it for the first time. The day ran from 9am to 4pm in 45-minute sections separated by smoke breaks. Coffee, canned drinks from the cooler and doughnuts were in almost endless supply. Pizza was ordered for lunch.

God is unashamedly part of the teaching. Steve Baughn says the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* explaining the **12 steps is the gospel explained in a drunk's language**; they are blessed with a tool to help them in their cross-cultural mission. Step 3 is a “*decision to turn our will and our lives over to the*



The new leaders

care of God as we understood him”. However Steve, leader of the workshop, was keen to point out, the step says “*as we understand him*” not “*when we understand him*”. (Steve and Dyan Baughn (left) are themselves recovered alcoholics and Steve will take

over from Tim as leader of *Church Army Branson* in May 2003 when Tim and his family return to Australia.) **It is starting with people where they are**. Steve told the group that when he first did the Steps, the only higher power he could conceive of was his sponsor, the man leading him through the steps. Only later did he discover God to be the higher power.

Mark's Story: 12 Steps in Practice



Mark Hedrick

Mark was born in Bonne Terre, Missouri. His Dad worked in construction and suffered from a drinking problem. Mark attended Church only twice as a child; although his Father wasn't bothered about Church, he told Mark to always believe in God.

Mark did well at school, especially at sports. Despite only dabbling with marijuana and alcohol at High School, his brothers got him involved in drug taking and drinking and there followed a 6 year period of using, making and selling

methamphetamine as well as taking cocaine and remaining permanently drunk. When Mark was 24 years old and working as a bouncer to his brother's nightclub, a brawl took place one night that left Mark with scars on his head and left his brother dead. Mark discovered the tragic news at hospital, having gone for stitches, when his brother was wheeled in, dead on arrival. Mark idolized his brother.

Soon after, Mark got caught stealing and received his first felony for 2nd degree burglary and was put on probation. When he tested positive for cocaine in 1991 during this probation, he was sent to 120 day treatment at the Farmington Missouri Penitentiary. This cycle continued for the next 9 years as the therapy he received in Prison did not keep him in permanent recovery. In 1998, Mark received his 3rd felony charge for being in possession of stolen Anhydraz, a vital ingredient for making methamphetamine. Released on probation after 11 months, he came to Branson for work and began to “use” again. His parole officer, faced with the

option of sending Mark back to Prison, took pity on him and sent Mark to the *Larry Simmering Recovery Centre* in Branson.

While in treatment, Mark cried out to God. He heard about the *Way Out Workshop* run by Church Army and attended. He met Steve but told me “*I didn’t care how much he knew, I wanted to know how much he cared*”. Mark alone in his room finished praying about his 4th step, making his “moral inventory”, and turned to prayer for his family. As he rested his head on his bed, he felt a tingling sensation in his body. He didn’t know what it was but he knew it was something spiritually good. He said it gave him courage to take his 5th step, confessing his moral inventory to another human being. He asked Steve to hear his 5th step. Steve told me that Mark began the session with head down and by the end was looking him straight in the eye. Steve became his sponsor and Mark having completed all 12 steps (except 9) while in treatment, continued to “hum” spiritually for 7 months. As people heard Mark’s story, they chose him as their sponsor. He has now heard 33 5th steps.

Mark attended *Alpha* at this time and at the *Holy Spirit Weekend* God told him that a family member would become a Christian that weekend. He told Steve and then rang home. The prophecy had been fulfilled! This was a big turning point for Mark. After 6 months of sobriety, Tim asked him to be a part-time case manager for *The Cambridge Project*. He now receives a disability cheque for a degenerative eye disorder that runs in his family. Mark is still working at his 9th step of making “*direct amends to such people wherever possible*”; only last Christmas did he get the opportunity to apologise to his Mum for having hit her once while under the influence. His experience has changed his whole attitude to parole officers; he now works in consultation with them to aid them in their attempts to rehabilitate addicts under their responsibility. **Mercy begets mercy.**

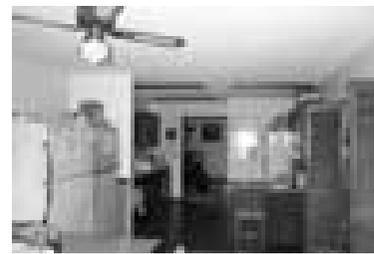
Oxford Houses

The successes of the average *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Narcotics Anonymous* group in the US have more to do with their teaching on change of environment than their use of the 12 steps (diluted). They maintain addicts recover best in a new setting away from their “old play mates” and as a

result a movement of *Oxford Houses* has grown up. *Oxford Houses* are group homes for recovering substance abusers that are democratically self-run and self-supported. For more information and house rules, visit

www.oxfordhouse.org.

When *Church Army Branson* began their *Way Out Workshop*, there was no *Oxford House* in Branson; the public transport system was deemed not good, making it difficult for house members to find work. Deciding this was not a



Top: 6th Street House front
Middle: Vaughn House inside
Bottom: Outdoor House inside

good enough reason, especially if a house could be bought on a main thoroughfare, *Church Army Branson* opened their first house in August of 1998. They now have three all male houses. **Vaughn House** opened in 2000 with room for 10 people. **6th Street House** also opened in 2000 for 7 people. **Outdoor House** opened in June 2002 and holds 8. Tim, as the leader of *Church Army Branson* and “chief grant application completer” is landlord.

Our guide for the tour of these houses was Bob. He came to Branson in December of 1995 and went to an A.A. meeting that put him in contact with Tim. Bob has relapsed twice at an *Oxford House*. If people relapse they are immediately evicted and must apply for the house again through interview as any first-timer would. It is hard to pin

down the exact criteria for re-admittance; making amends, showing sincere willingness to change are two of the things looked for. Recovering addicts are very good at identifying sincere willingness in each other.

Jarod is a younger member of *Outdoor House*. He is 18 and was 4 months

clean from alcohol and “meth” when I spoke to him. Having stolen a car, he ended up in treatment and applied for an *Oxford House* in Branson. Jarod got accepted at his interview even though he was only halfway through his treatment. At the hands of his Stepdad he suffered mental abuse and exposure to Cocaine. He has since helped his Mum separate from him. Jarod now works as a salesman for a marketing corporation while he works to get his General Education Diploma (equivalent to High School Diploma).

The Cambridge Project

In July 2001 the team sensed that the *Oxford Houses* weren't being as effective in their aftercare as they had hoped. Members of the houses were surveyed and results revealed the desire for lifeskills teaching and spiritual skills teaching. **House members recognized the need for greater accountability to help them stay motivated.** So the team invented *The Cambridge Project*. Each participant of the program (*Oxford House* members are not forced to come onto the Project) must be willing to commit to the following:

- **Complete a 12-step “Way Out” Workshop.**
Make an honest and consistent effort to apply the 12-step principles.
- **Meet weekly with a Church Army Case Manager for goal setting,** encouragement and progress assessment.
(There are 2 full time case managers and 3 part time)
- **Complete an 18-hour “Survival Course”** life skills training conducted by University of Missouri
- **Complete an Alpha Course** (spiritual skills training).



In addition, participants have access to computers, health counseling, emergency dental care and receive a graduation fund for successfully completing all criteria. The latter will be applied to obtaining permanent housing. Sean (left with Tim) is the first and only graduate of the scheme so far. Government and State Funding

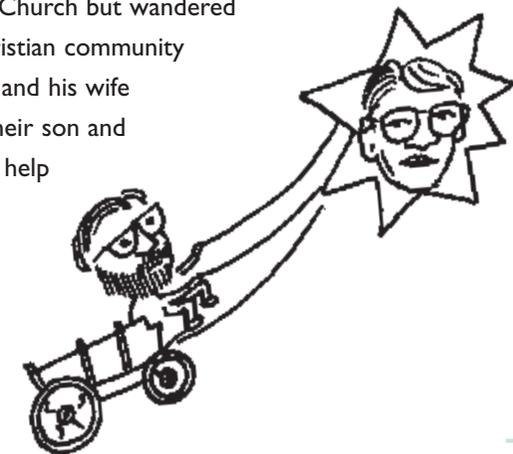
does not cover the costs of running the Alpha; overtly Christian, its costs must be handled separately.

Ray is *The Cambridge Project* Co-ordinator. 40% of his working week is given over to the Project. **His chief task, so he told me, was turning Tim's bright ideas into reality!** He attends each *Oxford House* Business Meeting (three a week), advertises the Project with the *Larry Simmering Recovery Centre* and probation and parole officers. He attends *Oxford House* interviews, acts as maintenance supervisor and exercises his spiritual gift of administration to complete all the forms to make the Project work. 17 are in the project and 27 have been; of the 27, some have relapsed but others have moved to *Oxford Houses* out of town.



Ray Francis

Ray is a recovered addict and one of the first people Tim met in Branson. Ray was born in Japan (his Dad was in the Air Force) and raised in California. His Dad joined the biker gang *The Galloping Gooses* after WW2, the environment Ray was then raised in. Both parents were alcoholics; his mother died from an alcohol and barbituates overdose. Nobody in his family talked about God or went to church. Ray stayed clean from the addiction he developed through joining a sober biker gang called *Fifth Chapter*. He experienced the Holy Spirit at a Pentecostal Church but wandered “in the desert” without any Christian community around him to disciple him. He and his wife moved to Branson to be near their son and met Tim when Judy was seeking help over health care for her broken arm. Tim made an impact on Ray because “he walked the walk, not just talked the talk”; from then on Ray “hitched his wagon to Tim's star”.



It must be stressed the funding for *The Cambridge Project* took a long time to come through. Tim and the team began the Project in faith and were granted funds on the basis that they were so committed to the Project that they had started without the money.

Alpha

Alpha is run three times a year on a Tuesday evening in the *Shepherd of the Hills* Episcopal Church building. Tim is convinced that *Alpha* is the best package for Christian discipleship available. **The model contains considerable potential to shatter people's previous misconception of church.** Through the eating together, all feel included; here the savoury course is served first and the sweet course between the talk and the small group sessions. This allows for a second smoke break also. In the small groups, people attending this *Alpha* can ask their difficult questions and not be looked down upon or excluded because of it. Through discussion, newcomers hear the testimony of those who have come through the course transformed, adding credibility and accessibility for those who struggle to learn in the lecture-style talks given by Tim despite his considerable skill in delivering the material.

Tim and his team take seriously the recommendation that people do *Alpha* no more than three times.

Members should be involved in the running of their second course and leading a group by their third. So all members of *Church Army Branson* are involved in *Alpha*. John, a recovered cocaine and



John Monteleon

meth addict, is now *Alpha* Co-ordinator. He came to his first *Alpha* with many awkward questions and stayed because of Tim's patience and care. John experienced the Holy Spirit while praying about *Alpha* – it was better than a cocaine rush!



One Alpha meeting with John

– and as a result John whole-heartedly believes they as a community are right to be doing *Alpha*.

For those who have completed three courses, a *Discovery* course is run at the same time as *Alpha*. *Discovery* is designed to develop spiritual discipline and the fruits of the spirit. On the Tuesday we visited, 25 people were doing *Alpha* and 9 people were doing *Discovery*. 20-30% of those attending were from *The Cambridge Project*.



Peace in the Storm

Peace in the Storm (or its unfortunate acronym P.I.T.S.) is the weekly worship service held on a Saturday evening. Like *Alpha*, they use the *Shepherd of the Hills* Episcopal Church building but in the past have used a variety of venues and are open to the possibility of using another venue in the future if deemed more suitable to their mission task. We went to both the Saturday night and the Sunday morning service. Both had just over 35 present not including the 3 dogs at *Peace in the Storm*.

Contrasting Saturday and Sunday

Peace in the Storm is printed entirely on sheets; the 10.30am Eucharist Episcopalian service required the use of three separate books. The P.I.T.S. service is similar in structure to the Service of the Word with vineyard style choruses (led from the piano) and prayers for those not yet Christians. There was also an opportunity for testimony. At *Shepherd of the Hills*, we sang hymns and



chanted a psalm led by choir and organ from the back and prayed for those within the church community, for the Armed Forces and those in leadership of the Church and State. At P.I.T.S. people sat together filling the first 7 or 8 pews; at *Shepherd of the Hills* each person had almost a pew to themselves. The most memorable announcement of *Shepherd of the Hills* was their need for volunteers, young or old, to train as acolytes. The only announcement from *Peace in the Storm* was that Cake was served!

They hold their weekly *Peace in the Storm* service on a Saturday evening for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is easier to find a venue for a service in Branson on a Saturday night. Secondly, the service doesn't rival other Church services on a Sunday morning despite the fact that ministers covenant to send back transfer growth. (Tim has been committed to the local pastor prayer movement from his arrival in Branson). Lastly, and most importantly, it gives these recovering addicts something definite to do on a Saturday evening where they once enjoyed their drinking or drugging.

So is this Church?

So is *Church Army Branson* a church? It fulfills Robert Warren's defining criteria of church as "worship", "community" and "mission". If being "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic" is the measure of whether something is a church or not, again *Church Army Branson* reaches out in these directions. Members are drawn on a "holy" journey to God through the *Peace in the Storm* service, *Alpha* and the *metanoia* of the 12-step process. They are being led into a journey of "oneness"; their gatherings are not held together by organisational artificial glue but a genuine desire and a mandate to support one another. The quality of their communal life outside of the normal schedule is proof of this. They are sent on the "apostolic" journey, through the necessity of the 12th Step (carrying this message to other alcoholics) to keep them in sobriety and the pressing need to find a way that also works for women, young people and in other towns surrounding Branson. They are saved from being introspective and complacent.

Church Army Branson feels called to live a "catholic" identity; they do not

exist by themselves. They come from some part of the wider church; **Tim is licensed by the Bishop of West Missouri**. They have been called to form yet a further part of the Episcopal Church. They follow the Episcopal Church Lectionary. As a lay person, Tim is unable to preside or baptize so a priest from a nearby town, a good friend and supporter of their work provides these ministries. They realize they need to have an *interdependent* identity within the body of Christ.

The Bishop of West Missouri has agreed to recognize *Church Army Branson* as "a mission church with sacramental support"; they do not need a sponsoring church if they can present their first 20 candidates for confirmation. The Bishop visits on April 26th 2003 for Baptism, Confirmation and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Tim has been teaching the Catechism in his talks at *Peace in the Storm* in preparation.

This emerging church has not found it easy to exist beside a traditional Episcopalian congregation. The enthusiastic support of other church leaders in Branson as well as key leaders in the community make the resistance from fellow Episcopalians especially painful to bear. **Traditional congregations, in theory want to be open to others but in practice want those others to become like them.** Here that is neither culturally practical nor desirable. The priority of the traditional congregation is priest and sacraments for the existing attenders; for *Church Army Branson*, their priority is their mission to the least, the last and the lost and form church as needed. *Shepherd of the Hills* is also struggling financially; the financial commitment of other churches and foundations to the work of *Church Army Branson* could create envy. **I long that both churches learn to live alongside one another** and that *Shepherd of the Hills* can find a way to reach out to those they can serve best. Just as *Church Army Branson* reaches out to the "working poor", there will be some for whom the priest, sacraments, classical music and propriety in worship at *Shepherd of the Hills* will be meaningful.

A Healthier Way to Form Church?

Church Army Branson is not only church **but it is a progression that the institutional church needs to learn from.** Theologically, the church was

a response to the mission of Jesus and its charge was to continue his mission. In that sense, the Church is first the consequence of mission before it is the conductor of mission. That is what happened here.

Church Army Branson have taken an apostolic journey into the mission field of the “working poor” in Branson, a group of people outside of church and formed church as a response to what God was doing with them. St Savior in Washington D.C. uses the following three questions as a practical outworking of this theological process:

- **What is the mission to this area?**
- **What kind of community is needed to sustain the mission?**
- **What set of spiritual disciplines is required to sustain the community in mission?**

Please note the order these questions are asked. The mission is primary. *Church Army Branson* are a very good example of this process. Tim and Jenny began by identifying the “working poor” as their target group for mission. Having spent time with this group, distributing surplus bread from a nearby factory and listening to their issues, they decided the mission to the area was tackling their biggest problem - addiction. A strongly supportive community was then needed to sustain this mission. *Alpha, Discovery, Peace in the Storm* have evolved to sustain the community in its mission. In addition, *Church Army Branson* spends less than 18% of their income on administration. Community leaders in Branson have noticed this. Charitable donors in the US are concerned that too much is spent on administration; 33% of a Charity's expenditure is considered the acceptable maximum.

Lessons they have to teach us

1 Cell Values not the Cell Model

As Tim himself commented, he subjected the team to a “nauseous amount of cell training” in the early years of *Church Army Branson*. I was curious to know why they were no longer running cell groups when they had done

previously. The answer was that they have no time to do cell; while *Alpha* and *Discovery* are running, all in the community are involved in either attending or running the course. Cell groups will meet in the summer (alongside barbeques down by the Lake) when *Alpha* stops.

More importantly, they have no need to do cell. Having invested so heavily in cell values, they found **they were growing the Christian community without needing the organizational cell structure to generate it.** They see and continue to encourage the values rather than make themselves slaves to the model.

2 Leadership

Indigenous leadership is normal in *Church Army Branson*. With only Tim and Jenny pioneering the work, they have had to grow leaders. They had hoped to utilize leadership from the local Episcopal congregation but very few came forward. Instead of importing leaders from outside the community, **they have chosen ones from inside** to the extent that you can count the number of non-recovering addicts on one hand. This is an intentional and systematic process and one Tim would have insisted on even if he and Jenny were not leaving. A turning point for those in leadership was the Cell conference Tim took them on; it wasn't so much the content of the conference that helped them (although it was good) but the self-confidence they gained from knowing Tim valued them and respected them as colleagues by insisting they all go. As Ray told me, Tim has a habit of “promoting incompetence”. It uplifts them to know Tim has respect for them. Almost everyone interviewed mentioned this.

3 Partnership

Not long after Tim and Jenny had arrived in Branson, they received a letter from an associate circuit Judge overwhelmed by 2,400 people on probation that were accountable to him. This Judge wrote to all the church leaders in Branson and only Tim responded. Tim offered to lead some of these people through an evangelism course and 300 people attended as a result.

Working with other organizations has been normal for *Church Army Branson*. They are constantly building relationship with the *Larry Simmering Recovery Centre* (right) and parole officers in the area to get to know addicts who want to recover. Treatment for anti-social behaviour is outsourced to individual counsellors. *The Cambridge Project* is almost entirely financed by Federal and State funding. I am told that, here in the UK, any group wanting to do something similar would have to invest time in networking to make themselves known and trusted in what is quite a small drug rehab field. Working with recovering addicts is no small feat; for this and other such demanding ministries, we would do well to develop a work that complements and maintains what is already provided by organizations and treatment facilities rather than attempting to run self-contained units.



4 Giving all?

Church Army officers in the USA have to raise their own financial support. After an initial shock Tim set off down this new road and found it raised up committed prayer partners and liberated resources unavailable through central church funds. **What looked like a burden he now sees as a blessing for givers and receivers.** We suspect this example may become more typical in the circles that are exploring new expressions of church.

5 Community

The mission task of this *Church Army Branson* would not survive without community; recovering addicts can be hard work! No one is left alone to shoulder the burden of working with those who are demanding and this sharing of responsibility seems to happen instinctively without rotas



or timetables. We were able to witness this first-hand during our stay. **Their absolute dependence on close community compels them to work at something that is necessary to all churches.**

Alan Kreider in his *Grove Liturgical Study 32 "Worship and Evangelism in Pre Christendom"* tells us that the Christians of the early Church did not allow non-believers to join their worship. Furthermore, they were not able to preach for fear of persecution. What attracted non-believers was their quality of community rather than the quality of their worship or the persuasion of their evangelistic preaching. At the beginning of the 21st Century, our worship is alien and irrelevant to almost all outside (and sometimes those inside) church. Evangelistic preaching is seen as offensive to those wishing to "pick and mix" what works for them spiritually. At best, evangelistic rallies in the UK, seem to help those on the fringes of churches to make commitments rather than the non-churched or de-churched. Missouri is the "Show me" state; people want to see something before they'll believe it.

We need Church leaders today who are trained to grow community.

Malcolm Grundy in his book *Understanding Congregations* (Mowbray 1988) writes that clergy in the UK are trained to lead "programme-based" or "pastoral-sized" churches. Consequently, they struggle to lead small or "family-sized" congregations where programme-based activities are inappropriate. I would add that for churches that are planted from scratch, skills in building authentic community is absolutely vital. **Furthermore, if we want our existing churches to grow we must allow ourselves to be challenged over the quality of our community life.**

6 Selflessness

The "big book" of Alcoholics Anonymous teaches that an alcoholic's thinking is one-dimensional; they think only in terms of "self". They stopped maturing emotionally when they chose alcohol or drugs to solve their problems. The 12-step process requires them to die to this self-centredness; every step takes them on a journey of reliance on God and love and respect for those they have injured through their addiction. **As a consequence, Church Army Branson are made up the most selfless people I have ever met.** While we were in Branson, Tim and Jenny threw a party for those of

us who were visiting and the *Church Army Branson* staff team. At no point in the evening was any visitor left alone; a very subtle gravitation took place of team members around the room. When I commented on this after, Steve Baughn attributed this almost instinctive awareness of those who might feel alone, to the 12-step recovery process. I long that this selflessness and calling to serve each other was present in more of our churches.

7 Discipleship Discoveries

Church Army Branson have had to **work out a way of discipling that doesn't break an already fragile person's spirit**. If one is heavy handed, you break their spirit; if discipleship is done in love, people can see Christ within you. As co-ordinator of *The Cambridge Project*, Ray has adopted a 3-step process to achieve this when working with Cambridge Project members who are reluctant or forgetful of their responsibilities.

- Make a request and wait
- Issue a command and soon after...
- Use gentle practical persuasion
(i.e. hand them a phone if they need to make a call).

Tim interprets Romans 7 & 8 as people being “works in transition”. They were in danger of losing half their community when they confronted people with heavy-handed discipleship. **Many things they have tried have failed**. Staff have had to learn not to put subconscious expectations on those that they are helping. They have to be realistic and live with delightful surprise rather than soul-destroying frustration. Shiftwork can be a problem for members attending regularly. Where possible, Tim encourages members to explain to their employers that, by attending discipleship or lifeskills courses, they will contribute to, and benefit from, a more dependable employee.

Tim doesn't expect a new believer to live as an accountable life as those who are part of his leadership team. He believes the 10 commandments were given to a people already in an established relationship with God; where people are only beginning to build a relationship with their heavenly Father, you have to let the Holy Spirit convict. This is the reason for Tim's belief that the average church cannot reach the poor without being radically

changed. They struggle to understand grace. For example, Tim has discovered “...the fastest thing to damage cell group work are Christians. They are often close-minded and self-righteous”.

“Evangelists are all about change”. They expect, work for and want it, whereas Tim's experience of working with all previous churches has left him suspicious of forming partnerships with welcoming parishes who are not already practicing evangelism. **It is questionable whether a congregation not already moving to some degree in evangelism will be willing to make the changes necessary to being vital partners with Church Army in mission.**

Was Mowbray right?

C.Hobart Mowbray saw the 12 step process of *Alcoholics Anonymous* as the blueprint for the emerging church of the 21st century **because it takes “guilt, confession and expiation seriously and will involve programs of action rather than mere groping for insight.”** 40 years later, *Church Army Branson* proves that addicts who work with the 12 steps in their original form recover. Their *Way Out Workshop* teaches “you don't have to understand the steps; you just have to do them”. What is more, the 12 steps and a church full of people that have all worked the 12 steps provide us with a prophetic reminder of what the worshipping people of God in community and mission should be.

Mowbray's comment is spot on. Their addiction, like an allergy, hangs around their necks like a death sentence. Staying clean and sober is necessary to stay alive. They cannot afford to take their sin, confession, and making of amends lightly. Furthermore, it is step 12, the carrying of the message to other alcoholics/addicts that keeps them in recovery. In many ways, what a gift! **How often are we, as Christians, blind to the addiction of our sin and hide behind what we pretend are our ordered and decent lives?** If only we were able to acknowledge our constant need of God to restore us to sanity, take rigorous steps to walk closely with him and carry the message to others. This is not only an expression of church to provide ways forward for those working with recovering addicts; this is an expression of church to challenge us all.

Claire Dalpra
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Where could you go from here?

Strategically...

■ Further sources

- Material on the 12 steps for UK small groups in churches:
12 1/2 Steps to Spiritual Health by Howard Astin (Monarch 2002)
- Conferences and other training is available from the Christian organisation **ISAAC** (International Substance Abuse & Addiction Coalition)
www.isaacinternational.com

- If you have **connections within diocesan permission givers**, 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 £4.

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
- **Resources for Evangelism and Discipleship for young people through Word on the Web.**
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We are a team supporting the evolving mission of the Church of England.