

ANOTHER PLACE IN THE SAME LAND



"Another Place" by Antony Gormley

**OBSERVATIONS AND THOUGHTS ABOUT
OUR PRACTICE OF 'CHURCH'
IN SMALLER CENTRES OF POPULATION**
a work in progress

To fellow travellers: an introduction

These are serious times for Christians in the United Kingdom. I have been troubled for years about the Church in England, especially as I experience it in a large rural village not far from a market town. I have Anglican roots with a wider experience of Christians of many flavours through life long contacts and through several decades of Christian conference centre work. I share the following as a fellow traveller immersed in the issues.

Two allegories have helped me.

The first came to me in 2019 as I was struggling to express the issues rolling around in my head about my experience of 'church'. I visited Antony Gormley's well known large sculptural installation at Formby, "Another Place". It was a moving experience that immediately linked compellingly with my concerns. I came to believe that God wants his church in the UK to be in another place in the same land: he requires radical change. Hence the title of this work..



The second allegory came the following year. I was asked to speak in church and given the texts from the lectionary. The principal text was the well known passage in Isaiah 60: Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. At the time, the beginning of a new decade I was struck by a cartoon in the Times reflecting the uncertainty facing us in the new decade. With a well known aqueduct and canal tunnel on the boundary of our parish, it was easy to illustrate my talk with the concept of travelling through a tunnel of dark and uncertain times and talk not only of Christ being our light in dark times but his statement that we also are to be the light of the world.

That would have been that were it not for an experience a few weeks later. My younger son and his family were living temporarily in New Zealand and we found ourselves exploring a former gold mining area. There is a tourist trail that takes in the Tunnel. This is a 1300 metre tunnel, dead straight and marginally up-hill. A remarkable experience with the light at the end of a tunnel being barely a pinprick in the distance. I was left with the overwhelming conviction that the tunnel in my sermon a few weeks before was going to be a very long tunnel. We were entering unusually difficult times.

Within two or three weeks of returning from NZ we were in the unprecedented time of lockdown and a world wide pandemic. Our troubled world is getting no better. On top of the normal round of conflicts and disasters we have had the Russian invasion of Ukraine and now the conflict in Israel. The effects of global warming are deeply troubling with unprecedented fires and floods. The politics of normally stable countries like the UK and the USA have been at times bizarre.

To top it off, for Christians, the influential worldwide Anglican Communion is fracturing with the mother church, the Church of England, re-interpreting the teaching scripture regarding same sex relationships. This has caused me considerable pain. In a sense it is the

loss of a familiar anchor point in my life. 2023 has been a year of reflection driven by the readings . An outcome is that I should return to the work I did on *Another Place* in 2019, set in the context of our decade of troubles and draw conclusions from both.

1. MY JOURNEY: INSIDE LOOKING OUT

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THE BACKGROUND

Most of my adult life has been in Anglican parish churches in large villages. In many ways we have been blessed. However there are remorseless issues that do not go away. They are intensified by a deeply secular society and the way church structures often fail to adapt thoughtfully. Communities lose their young people to education and work in the big conurbations. The move back rarely comes anywhere near replacing this on-going deficit. Christians are drawn away to the large churches in the area and this compounds the issue.

It is a familiar pattern. Churches in small villages disappear. Those in larger communities struggle. The problem is not just rural. Suburban districts suffer as



2. FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Christians go to churches elsewhere that have the 'eclectic pull' to attract the large congregations of 'thriving churches'. These are networked institutions that can attract a big enough following to run all-age activities, pay salaries and recruit enough volunteers to run '*the model church package*'.

In my village, which is not a typical 'traditional village' but a 'district' created by lines drawn on a nineteenth century map amalgamating several villages and a load of hamlets, these problems have beset us for decades. The 'parish' used to contain around nine churches and chapels! There are now three. Two are extremely small. The Anglican church has an average attendance around 35. About 30% come in to worship from other communities. We would struggle to survive without them. An informed estimate would be that now only 1.1% of the population of just under 3,000 worship in the civil parish on a normal Sunday. There are few children. There is a well attended monthly Messy Church. This, ironically, contains a majority of local children whose parents take them to other churches on Sundays! The parish is growing significantly and more houses are planned.

Unless God does something very special, it is reasonable to surmise, as the 60+ age group become less able to contribute practically and financially, that our church may not survive. Eventually there may be no resident Christian group living and worshipping in this growing large village. Many Christians who live in here attend churches elsewhere. It is a microcosm of all the problems of history, culture, structure and purpose that we face in "Being Church".

MY INITIAL RESPONSE

I started writing about this several years ago as a way of dealing with my thoughts and feelings. I gave up after some weeks. I felt I was not '*in the right place*'. I continued to discuss the problem and discovered extensive empathy. Many were experiencing exactly the same issues but all seemed as stuck as I was: feeling powerless to say anything let alone do anything significant except remain faithfully doing more of the same without addressing the issues. The obstacles to change are so immense that we do not even contemplate starting. In human terms alone, we continue to stare down a barrel of

What Jesus would do on Sunday?

[Obviously, he would go to my church!]

inevitability.

An additional problem is that the very expression of these thoughts carries a perception by some that one lacks faith! The normal formula to address church growth is that we should have more faith, pray more, listen to God more, be more committed. In other words: do more of the same thing better

and



3. MY JOURNEY: THE COLLECTION

more imaginatively and God will respond. Questioning this verges on the taboo. Failing to do so could repress the possibility that God may wish us to modify or change to achieve his objectives? [see also '*collective decision making*' Page 14] Stopping writing did not work. The 'burdens' in my head did not go away.



Jenni and I have done a lot of trail walking. To facilitate connections to one walk, we found ourselves in a county town at the bus station not far from the cathedral. An abandoned cinema was now a new church. Then we noticed another new church in a converted building on the other side of the bus station. Then we passed a Baptist church close by in the next street. What is going on?

More and more I began to see 'Church' from the outside looking in. Once this process starts, nothing is quite the same. So, I was well set up for another trip. We decided to have a once-in-a-life-time retirement holiday in New Zealand in 2017.⁽¹⁾ We were spending six weeks there so we determined to make a point of going to church every Sunday. Here we really were outsiders looking in on a country and a culture that is remarkably similar to our own in the UK.

Where do you go to church when visiting a new country? An internet search for our first Sunday at a seaside community with a population of about 2,000 revealed four churches in the centre of the community and more not far away. What was striking was that the church scene was almost identical to the UK. Our ancestors did a great job of exporting our faith and our church culture.



We ended up attending a fellowship church with less than 10 people. Each week we attended a different 'flavour' of church. The sermons were mostly good quality biblical teaching but the worship culture was strikingly different. It seemed that the churches were divided more by culture than by theology. Being an 'outsider looking in' one could not help wondering what was going on

and conclude how pathetic such arrangements are for Christ's mission.



In 2018 we went to a wedding in California. After, on a ten day tour of Canyonlands, we saw the ultimate church scene. Page is a relatively new town, founded in 1957 as housing for workers during the construction of a huge dam on the Colorado River. Page, with a population about 7,500 has developed as a stop-over for The Grand Canyon, Lake Powell, and other tourist hot spots. On our last day we drove out on a different road and became aware that the planners had put all the churches together on one road: a religious shopping mall! ^(2.)^(3.) Of the dozen or so churches, a few were not mainline orthodox churches. Nevertheless we could not help asking :



1. Completely out of the blue, we now have family in NZ - so we are going to have to go again!!
2. In our nearest larger centre of population there are six English speaking orthodox protestant churches within 500m of the town centre and another proposed.
3. It is unfair to compare Page to other places: virtually no-one lives in the surrounding area except in the tiniest of settlements. Whereas here, the populations of town and district are close to a balance. The comparison serves to underline how 'church' looks from the outside.

For the purpose of sharing my journey, imagine that I collect shells. In this instance, they are the observations and issues that have become an integral part of the journey. Each is worthy of an in-depth analysis but I just introduce them without adequate qualification and discussion. How significant are they? Do they all fit together? In no particular order:

As others see us Reading an article written shortly after the EU referendum, I

1. Wanderlust, A History of Walking, Rebecca Solnit, Penguin Books 2000, p.9.
2. Solnit, op cit,p.10
3. The Great British Divide, David Goodhart, Sunday Times 5.3.2017.
4. Matthew 19:24
5. Matthew 22: 1-14



was mortified to see a commentator likening the immediate fall-out between the different Brexiteer groups to the way the protestant Church has behaved over the past few centuries. Our behaviour was used by a secular commentator as an analogy for political infighting, disarray and disunity!

Society today How do we function as Church in UK society as it now exists? How much do people live just in their personal networks? What is the relevance of community? What life do people have beyond family and work and how does instant digital communication change the whole scene? These are huge topics but how do they relate to our expression of church.?

My interest in walking led me to the work of Rebecca Solnit. In an excellent preface to her history of walking she makes a series of salient points about modern life. *"Many people nowadays live in a series of interiors – home, car, gym, office, shops – disconnected from each other. On foot everything stays connected, for while walking one occupies the spaces between those interiors. One lives in the whole world rather than interiors built up against it."*¹ *"New time saving technologies make most workers more productive, not more free, in a world that seems to be accelerating around them."*⁽²⁾ Although used to extol the virtues of walking, there is general wisdom in these insights. How much do we live in boxes? **How much is 'my church' just another disconnected box** which primarily functions as an *"interior built up against the whole world"*?

In

1. Deuteronomy 28:15ff especially v.20
2. Matthew 24 especially 36—44
3. Luke 12: 35 –40
4. For a short meditation try reading Amos or Hosea in one sitting from a free translation
5. Ezekiel 9: 3–6

2017 David Goodhart wrote about division in society between people who see the world from 'Anywhere' and those who see it from 'Somewhere'. *"Anywheres"*, he argues, *"dominate our society and have portable achieved identities based on educational and career success which make them generally confident with new places and new people. 'Somewheres' usually have an ascribed identity based on group belonging and particular places."*⁽³⁾ He discussed the impact of this divide on political and economic issues. I wonder

whether this phenomenon is also a characteristic of church membership. **How many churches function primarily as a network for ‘Anywheres’? What remains for ‘Somewheres’ in smaller communities?**

We have started a ‘Thames Journey’: an age-driven alternative to walking every inch of the Thames Path! This has been a culture shock. Not only is the Thames a very different river but the area exudes wealth and power. New top-of-the-range cars abound and property is very expensive with many heavily gated and high perimeter wall residences. Of course, there are wealthy people of deep faith but Jesus said wealth makes entering the kingdom hard.⁽⁴⁾ My own area was almost the only rural area in the UK to qualify some 20 years ago for special educational provision because of poverty.



There are large social housing estates in town and in the villages but the ‘big car phenomenon’ is increasing. Residence in my own hamlet is now beyond those on average wage. Our churches have few from the lower end of the housing spectrum. The Foodbank is busy. In Christ’s Banquet there is another continuum from the materialistic guests too pre-occupied to attend to those on the street corners whom we are required to compel to come.⁽⁵⁾ Where are we in all of this? How do we respond in our attempts to be ‘church’? Distribution of wealth and power issues are bigger than ever in the UK. Many on average and below average incomes are economically and socially trapped, more vulnerable to the pressures of life and confined to districts where the impact of resident Christian witness is scarce.

Our times are difficult times. Historically this is nothing new but there seems to be a qualitatively different feel about the degree of confusion around. It brings to mind the informative treatise by Moses on the national consequences of ignoring God. Confusion, chaos and diminishing returns are characteristics.⁽¹⁾

More and more frequently we hear ordinary secular commentators using the word ‘apocalyptic’ in their descriptions of world events. Certain political, physical and technological developments are in themselves mind-blowing. We need to take calm note. Jesus states that we do not know the time of his return but he is equally clear that we should be able to determine the ‘season’.⁽²⁾ He is also clear that our response should be a watchful alertness while we are diligently engrossed in the everyday routines of our calling.⁽³⁾



Thinking about these matters gives me a greater sense of urgency in respect of family, friends and others to the mission call to the Church. The 'doom bits' of the prophets that appear to be studiously avoided in church have much to teach about nature of human behaviour and the heart of God in the face of difficult times.⁽⁴⁾ God is always interested in remnants and his small faithful band living in the difficult times.⁽⁵⁾ A bland expectation of revival regardless of God's work with nations and without prior practical response from his people may not be always appropriate. We need to reflect and pray on how our attitudes and processes should respond to our times. Times which bear all the hallmarks of needing God's work of over-turning wrong and bringing justice.



Finally there are a series of issues too close to home for comfort. I have put on elephant boots and entered the china shop of issues that are, to all intents and purposes, taboo subjects. In doing this I make the observation that many characteristics of life exist on a continuum: many things are good but there are very subtle lines that we all cross when a positive thing starts to change to being a negative thing. For example: God puts a capable person in a role that fits their knowledge and ability perfectly. That person steams off and does great things but suddenly, one day, it becomes 'his' or 'her' job rather than God's job and the plot is lost. The transition from being positive to negative can be extremely subtle but it is a part of our Christian experience. The comments I make are in the context of accepting these subtle transitions and our collective struggle to remain on the positive side of these continua. They are directed as much at myself as anyone else.



Why do we attend a particular church? Traditionally we attend the type of church our parents went to. This was often about doctrine. New converts may not fully understand these niceties and will probably stick with where they first got involved. The

situation has evolved and remains dynamic.

1. Luke 12:1
2. Jeremiah 23:16ff Ezekiel 13: 2-6 Isaiah
3. Amos 5:21-24

Church membership realities I thought of all the Christians locally that I had either worked with in a para-church setting or shared church membership with over the years. Of those who were still living in the area, I listed the churches where they now worship. No less than twelve local churches were on the list. This is a very significant observation in terms of potential outcomes.



The Anglican church I now attend has almost 40% of its people from non-Anglican backgrounds. In recent years a few churches in the area have had issues and there has been significant times of transference of members between churches. Whilst the larger denominations may officially have significant doctrinal differences, if one avoids nit-picking and when it comes to 'on-the-ground practice', it is difficult to identify huge theological differences.

In my experience, never before has there been so much common ground between ordinary Christians than there is now. If anything, as we observed in New Zealand, the differences are more about culture than theology. If I am right, this represents an important phenomenon and creates a whole series of very practical opportunities to grasp. Can lay people drive a transformation?



To what degree is the church I attend “My church” and to what degree is this positive or negative? Jesus warns against the ‘yeast of the Pharisees’.^[1] For me this is all about crossing the line from our church life being about God to it being about Me: becoming “My Church” ... something that meets ‘My Needs’ - plus the killer criterion that justifies everything: those of ‘My Family’. This is a well worn hazard of faith. *“You must go to a church where you feel at home where ... where ... where”* and the list grows. It is a widely accepted premise of church life for Western Christians. The theology is poor.

Of course we must steer away from error. As young Christians and older ones in difficult periods, we need nurturing and sustaining but Church is primarily about the service of others in the name of the Lord. Many of the leaders of Jesus’ day had crossed the line: for them church was about self-fulfilment, status and power.

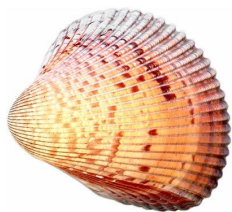
We often make the smug mistake of thinking that the ‘church’ in the days of

Jesus and those of the great prophets could not possibly have any parallels with our times. Although often in serious error, religious practice abounded. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were plagued by prophets who claimed to have had an encouraging word from the Lord.⁽²⁾ But their faith had crossed the line to a self-indulgent religion which God hated.⁽³⁾ Between the lines of the gospels we can see that Jesus was often contending with those who wanted him to sign up to their brand of 'church'.

We need to examine ourselves very deeply and acknowledge whether there are ways in which we have got too close to the margin in the subtle differences between 'My church' and 'God's Church'. God's Church is about changed lives, service and costly mission in the places God has put us. "My church" can be a negative and unacknowledged premise of our church life in the UK. It is so easy to cross that positive / negative boundary without realising it.

Church Leaders are frequently in a quadruple bind on this. As

with all of us they face the challenge to keep self out of it. They also have on their shoulders all the expectations of their members to make their church meet their needs. It takes a strong leader to subjugate the needs of members to those of mission. Furthermore they are often paid or appointed by their denomination with the back-stop demand of up-holding organisational goals and the status quo. This is not wrong but is it always positive? To top everything else leaders are frequently under extreme pressure from all sides: running to stand still. Perhaps leaders need to use more the techniques of managing and supporting people in groups that maximise human resources. Have the roles and tasks of church leaders got to be modified. This, especially in the attitudes and behaviours of lay people?



Denominational structures have a residual tendency to be about organisational survival. This also applies to structures in 'free churches' which can be even more difficult because they are 'informal'. I have a concern that the large denominations seem unable to respond to the more fluid demands of 'enabling small church'. I am also concerned that whilst their big churches thrive, a new generation of potential leaders will not identify with the institutional baggage of these organisations. We could lose the baby with the bathwater. *[See also Christian student values Page 13]*

For decades we have known and applied the **principles of mission** to missionary work. We would be amazed if those involved did not learn the language, adopt the culture and live amongst those they were called to serve. But at home we appear to switch those principles off. It is perfectly acceptable for churches to have many people from outside their local community and for these members not to be daily engaged with the social and geographic community of the church. Conversely by default, these non-resident members frequently lack the time and the local church support to engage deeply in community relationships with people where they live.

Many will claim, quite legitimately, that there is no 'church life' where they live. This is an incredibly complex matter. Also, without doubt, many are genuinely called to minister in areas where they do not live. However, according to the principles of mission, this is not the norm: live where you minister, minister where you live. Herein lies the relevance of the debate of networking versus community and other matters I have raised. There are no universal answers but we need to review our attitudes and behaviour. We need to examine the demands of the realities of the places where we live, work and worship. It is difficult to join in with and witness to a community to which you do not belong. Can we be salt and light when we are not there?



I have followed the experiences of a missionary couple over the last 50+ years. They spent years learning languages and then went to live with the people to whom they were called adopting their life style. It was decades before their team really saw any fruit but later the results were spectacular. Now retired in the UK, they really struggle with the issues I am raising. They try to witness to their community where they feel the churches have lost the plot. For fellowship they attend a large eclectic church elsewhere with a near 'perfect' and well attended Sunday service but only a handful are active midweek. The Sunday get-together appears to be the over-whelming church priority: the rest of the week?

1. see <https://www.uccf.org.uk/about/mission-vision-values.htm> for expanded version
2. Jeremiah 29: especially 4-9
3. Ezekiel 34: 1-6 ... *Fortunately we enjoy the presence and example of the ultimate shepherd in Ezekiel 34:11-31*



This is not uncommon. **Large churches sometimes struggle** to get anyone to do anything. In terms of member active participation they can be out-stripped by smaller churches whose viability is on the line and where the percentage of members who are deeply active is higher.

There is also the issue of the demands of modern family and work life that reduce the **volunteer time and energy** available. This is compounded by the **professionalisation of ministries** that used to be undertaken by volunteers. Large churches can afford paid staff and can keep up with all the small print regulation of modern life. Small churches cannot.

This links with the **complex interplay of basic economic principles and faith initiatives**. Churches are not exempt. Small churches simply cannot keep up: the syndrome of the corner store versus the supermarket. But should Christian communities be at the mercy of these economic norms?

This is relevant to the concepts we hold of **‘model church’** where there will be full time ministers, maybe a youth specialist, possibly a part time administrator and some volunteers sustaining a plethora of initiatives. All age groups will have their special needs met. They can afford better plant and equipment. This thriving church will naturally attract more to join in. Of course they are frequently places of great blessing and many have significant strategic roles to play in helping students and young people. Might these churches be able to explore other strategic roles in working with smaller churches ? *[see page 16 para 3 and 17 para 5]*



Where does this leave the rest: all the places where the demographics simply don't add up to sustain 'model church': the smaller communities of around 3,000 people. Similarly in larger communities of 10,000 plus where different churches, in a sense, compete to achieve 'model church status' but in reality are struggling because without mutual co-operation they have not the demographics to do this. This is central to the heart of my main concerns. I do

1. "Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking" Matthew Syed published 10.9.19.
2. The Times. Monday 2nd September 2019
3. Isaiah 6: 9-10; Ezekiel 12: 1,2; Matthew 13: 13-17



4. ANOTHER PLACE

IN THE SAME LAND ?

not see that we are making any substantial progress in dealing with these realities. The forces of drift and inertia work alongside the frenetic pace of secular modern life. Perhaps many of us are also becoming entangled in a survival mode that replaces our mission call all these things add up to a critical situation.

September 2019 *and my collection keeps growing!*

I was invited back to The Quinta because of my long association with the national Christian Student Leaders' Forum Conference. 2019 was Forum's 100th year of which just over 30 have been at the Quinta. I was struck afresh by the example of an organisation deeply committed to and experienced in enabling and promoting Christian Mission. Their programme booklet begins with their mission, vision and values. These include a confidence in their 'offer', a passion for unity and an urgency within a spirit of grace and generosity.

Their week included prayer, bible teaching and worship. Alongside there were many cutting edge seminars to equip these students to lead others in the intensive and frequently hostile environment of higher education. They are **focussed and trained** in a way that is in sharp contrast to our church life. Do we need to re-discover some of that focus and consequent training and learning?

Christ moved immediately from the dynamics of personal faith expressed in the beatitudes to the demands of Church life being salt and light in the community. He castigated the Pharisees for drift to the position where faith was about their personal needs. Jeremiah told the exiles to get completely stuck in to the place that God had sent them. ⁽²⁾ Ezekiel passed on a blistering attack on the 'shepherds': people of faith who had lost the plot. ⁽³⁾ A look at the negative is very informative about what the positive looks like. Read Amos 5:21-24 in the colourful language of The Message! The students have something to teach us.

The last of my collection came from an article on a new book by Matthew Syed, a perceptive sports commentator. ⁽¹⁾ Syed specialises in all aspects of performance. His book apparently reviews problems in **collective decision-making**. He refers to Foster Wallace's concept of 'perceptive blindness'. We are so used to thinking in a particular way that we do not even see our blind spots. *"When homogenous groups underperform, they do so in predictable ways. When you are surrounded by similar people you are not just likely to share each other's blind spots but to reinforce them. When people from a singular back-ground are placed into a decision-making group they are liable to become myopic."* ⁽²⁾

Being Christians, we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we look at the problems of the Church do we allow the Holy Spirit to take us beyond our collective myopia or are our defences too strong? Syed's observation has some biblical echoes and is particularly relevant in our church world which is vulnerable to perceptive blindness because of the correct structures of our decision-making ⁽³⁾

I began by saying that I had been led to an uncomfortable place. It is profoundly disturbing. Our myopic attitudes and behaviours, in the way we collectively 'do Church', are stripping large parts of our country of community based centres of corporate witness and worship. Thankfully there are hopeful exceptions but this is a widespread critical situation. It is against accepted principles of mission.

In summary: how do we witness to smaller communities in our secular society where we do not have the demographics to attain anything like a thriving church model? Unless God does something very special, Christian witness will be confined to large eclectic area churches within two decades. How do we do small church? What does it look like? How can it be sustained? Should we even try? We need to have an honest, rigorous, prayerful and loving conversation.

How do we respond?

How do we make sense?

Where do we start?

I have tried to put into words my journey, thoughts and observations. Despite all the inherent limitations and flaws of these, I suggest some starting points for discussion and response. It is an effort to make sense: to look for God's creative work in our motley collection of shells!

In our area I believe the conditions are right to start a journey of change. It is not about great ecumenical projects; it is not about changing structures. Rather, it is

about a gradual sea-change in attitudes and on-the-ground processes: *another place in the same land*. These start with the individual.

The personal end of the equation

1. I am aware that some will see the archetype scenario of 'competing supermarket churches' as positive. It is about diversity and choice and may attract more ordinary people to attend church. If churches fail then it can be argued that this is all part of God's wider picture. Others may also disagree somewhat with my contention that small churches are moving into a terminal crisis. Yet others may agree but feel there is nothing we can do to modify how we 'do church'. My response is to ask for a realistic, but not pessimistic, prayerful evaluation without falling into the trap of 'perceptive blindness'. It would be relatively easy to survey areas to test out my assertions about church membership.
2. There is already a wonderful move to pray. Perhaps this should be supplemented by a call to lament? Acknowledgement that things are not good enough has to precede improvement. Prayer for ourselves and specific prayer for our communities is our start point. But prayer is not an isolated mind exercise: it is a deep communication with the Lord, arising from desire. If that desire has any depth at all, it will naturally manifest itself in our ordinary attitudes and behaviours.

Individual churches

3. Individual churches and their leaders have a huge role in raising the profile of these personal dynamics. Perhaps we should set explicit and targeted goals in our prayer, teaching and training to 'up-grade' our membership in terms of their personal spirituality, active participation and engagement in mission. Perhaps we need to review the techniques we use to achieve this? With a larger focussed and engaged core membership things will happen if they are managed and directed appropriately. Implicit is the need to come to terms with people turning away, as they did with Jesus, when the going is tough or the demands become greater. Jesus concentrated on the few.
4. Perhaps individual churches can make a conscious move away from the 'my church syndrome' by taking a critical look at their culture. Have they gradually slipped into a myopic condition in this respect? Have they got enthusiastic practical programmes for mission which other local Christians could be invited in to join? Is their cultural expression of their

faith too extreme to allow other Christians to feel comfortable working with them? Have they anything to learn from the student world and para-church organisations that 'manage' their peripheral theology and their culture to facilitate following Christ's objectives in focussed unity? Can they earn the right to be a genuine neighbourhood church?

Individual churches working together in new ways

1. In 80%+ of their activities, churches behave as though their neighbouring churches were on a different planet. Try calculating objectively what degree of truth, if any, is in that statement in respect of your church!
2. There are enough churches in our area theologically more or less on the same page, for them to work together in small groups to start to sustain and help each other in their mission to their communities. We have to respond, under the Lord, to the demographic realities of these communities. Something has to change. A new mindset: how can we maximise efficiency, effectiveness in localised outcomes by sharing what we already do?!



3. Already, some local Anglican churches are experimenting with a shared youth initiative. The biggest driver of this was probably survival but how much more powerful would it have been if this had been interdenominational and the larger churches had also joined in?

4. Churches could work together in specialist areas. For example: if 3, 4 or 5 churches each supplied one or two people to develop a bereavement team for the area that could support ministers with in-depth ministry tied into the church of that community what potential! With imagination we could develop shared but localised resources with the ability to make a real impact in key areas



1. Matthew 215: 31ff 2. John 6.66

of need. Similarly: could we not have a single holiday club team doing a sort of roadshow mission at a series of different churches for a holiday club week or so culminating in something special for that area / small group of churches? This could be an initiative much better resourced and effective than a single church could sustain.

5. It is also possible to share a focussed training programmes or even a residential. CTOD has done similar things over Lent but if a small geographic group of churches suspended their home groups or whatever for six weeks and engaged in a shared mission directed training course, this could unlock some significant attitude and process changes. In these ways and many other ways we could work to mitigate the problems of small church and manage appropriately specialist provisions that are currently unsustainable. In this the larger churches are potentially resource links for smaller churches in smaller communities.



6. Frequently church is about authority and control. These things are important but they are deeply vulnerable to the positive/negative continuum. Do these elements stray into the negative becoming anti-task in Christ's mission? If churches begin to work together this is the first place where the rubber hits the road. However, by avoiding structural change and concentrating on step by step attitudes and processes, life is a lot easier. Nevertheless, trust and mutual obedience to the Lord's direction is crucial. Giving out and letting go for large churches is obviously costly and hard.

POST SCRIPT Those who know something of the history of missions will know of the 'Cambridge Seven' who went as missionaries to China in 1885. They were an inspiration to their generation. Those who have read between these covers will understand when I say that I have been able to add a star fish to my inanimate collection of shells. I have become aware of a group of seven young Cambridge graduates who are currently pursuing their careers but have chosen to live in a demanding residential inner city area to discover how to be church in and for that community. Can they be an example to us all and inspire a commitment to a revolutionary renewal of our attitudes?



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