

Bringing Hope and the saga generation- a Mission-shaped Church for Older People

By Mark Russell

Jesus spoke powerfully and directly to those on the fringes of society- to the alienated and the rejected. His inspiration has challenged Christians into mission amongst street workers, homeless people, youth subcultures and other groups often marginalised in our society. But for years, the unsung heroes of mission have been those working with our increasingly ageing population — a group characterised by many as those who are dependent, suffering with illness, isolated, often difficult or challenging people; but is that the whole story?

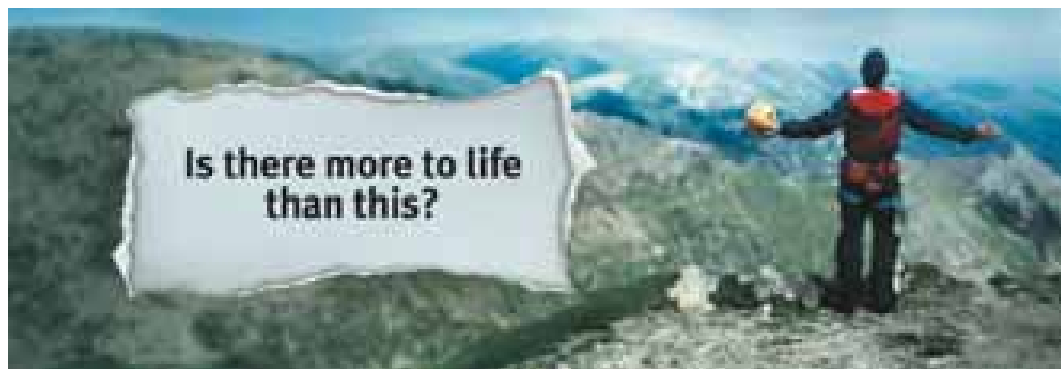
The world has moved on since, before I was even born, the Beatles famously sang “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m 64?” Those of pensionable age — a group which now statistically features the writer and singer of that song, Paul McCartney, isn’t a single homogenous group. We need to wake up to the challenge that the baby boomer generation has blossomed into a generation more likely to love rock ‘n’ roll, creative expression, controversial broadcasting and partying than institutionalised wartime singalongs.

As we start to run with Christ’s great commission and step into the lives of people outside the church, we must remember that the early church was famed because of its incredible community that spanned across culture, class, gender and age.

Church Army’s ministry has focussed on ‘the least, the last and the lost’ in every generation, and so as well as our evangelists working in nightclubs and youth groups, we have others meeting the challenge of developing the sort of fresh expressions of church that Jagger and McCartney would fit into.

Church Army has been bringing hope to the older generation for over 120 years and was a founder member of Age Concern and Friends of the Elderly and these people are at the centre of our work today across the UK and Ireland. Church Army Sister Penny Horseman works at Mind, Body and Spirit Fairs in Colchester, Essex.

Here she engages with some new agers who were the movers and shakers in the 1960s. A generation with a keen interest in spirituality but a deep distrust of traditional religion. An increasing proportion of these pre-seniors have never had any meaningful contact with church in their lifetime. Mission here is about engaging



with them where they are, like Penny is doing, rather than inviting them back to traditional forms of church they’ve already dismissed as irrelevant.

When people hit retirement it is a time of re-evaluation. This is no longer seen as the end, but as the start of freedom and independence and a time when people start asking the Alpha course questions (“Is this it?”) and confronting their mortality.

Working with the CEA Church Army has produced a powerful film *The Big Hope* exploring responses to questions about hope after death around Woody Allen’s famous quote about not wanting to be there when it happens. See it at www.hopeInfo.co.uk.

I am delighted that Church Army and the Leveson Centre have published *A Mission-shaped Church for Older People* which explores many of the issues and challenges developing effective forms of mission and church to pre-seniors (55-64), Seniors or third agers (65-80) and the dependent older frail (over 80s). Many of Church Army’s retired Evangelists are themselves more active in their so-called retirement in God’s service than they were when fully employed by a church or mission agency. More people than ever before bring to their retirement activism, independency and a sense of adventure.

Our older citizens have an immense amount of experience and wisdom to offer as part of our outreach programmes in the community.

Church Army’s Paul Warren has written about retired ordinary church members who use their skills to give the drop-outs from the local schools a chance to find employment. They refurbished a hut, contacted local schools and began teaching practical skills such as woodwork, electrics, plumbing and gardening. Over the workbench, they share their faith. Older and younger

men would also work side by side on a voluntary basis to assist the elderly frail with day to day house maintenance tasks.

At 34 I feel young; but I know I will need others who are now only children to be part of my future. In a society when people are remaining active longer and over five and a half thousand people last year received a centenary telegram from the Queen, we need to encourage more people into ministry with the elderly and persuade all Christians that this is

exciting, varied and challenging work. In Mark 12, a widow puts a tiny amount into the treasury compared to the abundance that those around her put in but it is her act of worship and generosity that Jesus highlights.

A mission-shaped church should reach out to people and enable them to worship God even if their hand is too arthritic to carry a litter picker and they’re too poor to put much in the collection. Do we really believe that time spent sharing the gospel with a senior citizen is as valuable to God as developing an active and vibrant youth programme or home group network? God’s love for us is eternal so let’s ensure the hope we offer others in Christ is for at least a full lifetime.

Let us be excited by the prospect of discovering more about ourselves as we step out in faith and creativity to serve those who have helped build our communities as we acknowledge that the generation that gave us life now need us to step up to the plate and help them discover the love of God and the hope and peace that this brings.

We need to do this with sensitivity to their culture and outlook, free from assumptions and journey with them to discover a place where this generation can be themselves, explore their needs and concerns and allow them to meet with God.

Mark Russell is Chief Executive of Church Army and keynote speaker at the launch of “A Mission-shaped Church for Older People?” a report from Church Army and the Leveson Centre available priced £10.00. Orders enclosing a cheque payable to The Foundation of Lady Katherine Leveson should be sent to The Leveson Centre, Temple House, Fen End Road, Temple Balsall, Knowle, Solihull B93 0AN. Copies can be ordered on line at www.levesoncentre.org.uk

APPOINTMENTS

The Rev Rita Ball,

Rector, Wantage Downs (Oxford): to be Rector, Hermitage (same diocese).

The Rev Christine Bandawe,

Assistant Curate, Middleton St Mary (Ripon and Leeds): to be Team Vicar, Seacroft (same diocese).

The Rev William Blakey,

Rector, Brize Norton and Carterton (Oxford): is now also Area Dean, Witney Deanery (same diocese).

The Rev Nicholas Darby,

to be Vicar, Fenham St James and St Basil (Newcastle).

The Rev Dr Peter Doll,

Team Vicar, Abingdon (Oxford): to be Res-identiary Canon, Norwich Cathedral (Norwich).

The Rev Kenneth Gabbadon,

Rector, Newton Heath (Manchester): to be Chaplain, Armley Prison (Ripon and Leeds).

The Rev Susanne Jukes,

Assistant Curate (Associate Priest) Aldborough with Boroughbridge and Roecliffe; and Assistant Diocesan Director of Ordinands (Ripon and Leeds): to be Chaplain, HM Prison Full Sutton (same diocese).

The Rev Janet Lawrence

(Oxford): to be NSM (House for Duty), Lavendon with Cold Brayfield, Clifton Raynes and Newton Blossomville (same diocese).

The Rev Theresa Kuin Lawton,

NSM (Curate in Training), Bampton with Clanfield (Oxford): to be also Chaplain, Magdalen College School Oxford (same diocese).

The Rev Thomas Moore,

Assistant Curate, Bushey (St Albans): to be Assistant Curate, Aldershot Michael (Guildford).

The Rev Matthew Porter,

Vicar, Woodseats, St Chad (Sheffield): to be Assistant Curate (Associate Minister) York St Michael-le-Belfrey (York).

The Rev John Robertson,

Vicar, Grove (Oxford): to be also Rural Dean, Wantage Deanery (same diocese).

The Rev Robert Simmonds,

Chaplaincy Co-ordinator HM Prison Peterborough (Peterborough): to be Chaplain, Broadmoor Hospital Crowthorne (Oxford).

The Rev Janice Smith,

NSM (House for Duty Priest) Bramhope (Ripon and Leeds): to be Priest-in-Charge, Bramhope; and Priest-in-Charge, Ireland Wood (same diocese).

The Rev Brian Surtees,

NSM (Associate Priest), Tye Green with Netteswell (Chelmsford): to be also NSM (Associate Priest), Chipping Ongar with Shelley (same diocese).

The Rev Peter Sutcliffe,

Vicar, Lightcliffe (Wakefield): to be Vicar, Lesbury with Alnmouth; and Vicar, Longhoughton with Howick (Newcastle).

The Rev Ian Todd,

Assistant Curate, Scotforth (Blackburn): to be Vicar, Hitchin (St Albans).

The Rev Catherine Williams (nee Brereton),

Vicar, Middlesborough St Chad (York): to be Team Vicar, Woughton (Oxford).

RETIREMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

The Rev Helen Arnold,

Assistant Curate, Cowgate (Newcastle): to resign with effect from 30 November 2008.

The Rev Cleophas Lunga,

Team Vicar (acting Rector), Coventry Caludon (Coventry): to be Bishop of Matabeleland, Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe).

The Rev Oswald Post,

Priest-in-Charge, Youlgreave, Middleton, Stanton-in-Peak and Birchover (Derby): to retire with effect from 30 April 2009.

LAY AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS

The Rev Nils Chittenden,

UK Co-ordinator of the Churches Community Work Alliance; and Director Transferable Skills Programme St Chad’s College Durham; and Minor Canon, Durham Cathedral; and Chaplain, St Mary’s College Durham (Durham): to be Diocesan Missioner; and Bishop’s Advisor for Campus; and Young Adult Ministry (North Carolina, The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America).

The Rev Neil Watkinson,

Assistant Curate, Maidenhead St Andrew and St Mary (Oxford): to be Assistant Curate (Associate Minister), St George Singapore and Crosslinks (Singapore, The Province of the Anglican Church in South East Asia).

CORRECTIONS

The Rev Pamela Pennell,

NSM, Great Waltham with Ford End (Chelmsford): to be Priest-in-Charge, East Hanningfield (same diocese).