

Urban Ministry and Theology Project, Newcastle East Deanery Annual Report 2003

One of the conditions that came with our Church Urban Fund grant was that our work was to be evaluated. We were fortunate to be able to appoint Professor Hilary Russell a sociologist who works at *Liverpool John Moores University* in the *European Institute of Urban Affairs*. She has had a wide experience of evaluating regeneration programmes and in the North East, most recently, she evaluated the community strategy of the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation.

In January this year, for the Trustees of CUF she wrote what she called a good practice note. One of the comments she made highlighted the dynamic nature of UMTP's work:

The evolution of UMTP has illustrated the need to keep under constant review contextual changes, external and internal demands and pressures, their implications for staff roles and management structures and the wider questions they raise. It underlines the wide range of choices that are constantly faced, implicitly or explicitly, about what to do and how best to use limited time and about style of working.

The past year has seen a very definite evolution in the way that UMTP has moved on and we have been faced with many choices as to the use of limited resources and the style of our work. The main feature of the past year, it seems, is that UMTP's work has become more focused and we have seen a deeper engagement with communities, with our churches and with the world of theological education. As this has happened there have been inevitable decisions to make about priorities.

In this, the first part of the annual report we will outline the position we are in in our major projects. In the second half, each member of staff will outline the way that we see the future developing in each of the task areas.

Community Engagement

The community engagement role has wide-ranging objectives to do with building the capacity of the East End community and within that the local church community. The way that these objectives are being fulfilled is through work on a discrete number of projects.*

There is little doubt that the key piece of work under development is the East End Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (EECVSF). This is a strategic piece of work that reflects the growing size and influence of the voluntary sector across our four local authority wards. There are over 120 member groups all of which are kept informed by frequent mailings and they are invited to attend regular discussions on the social and economic regeneration of the area. A sizeable sum of money has been released for a feasibility study on a potential local building re-development that could act as a focus and enabling point for the sector as its work grows.

* All the aims and objectives for UMTP may be found on the website at www.umtp.org

Under the banner of the EECVSF project staff have represented the sector, including the churches, in key decision making processes to do with the regeneration of Walker Riverside. Most recently, they have sat on the East Area Going for Growth Advisory Group which is now overseeing some of the decision-making. There are many outstanding issues as to how the local community is represented and these will be fully faced later in the year with a full public debate over the nature of the local delivery structure for the Newcastle Partnership. Exactly how this is to happen is far from settled as a number of alternatives are currently being explored. UMTP staff members have a strong concern that the final outcomes must reflect a genuine involvement of local persons in partnership with all the sectors in our community. The new body will deliver the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy in the East End

The East End Partnership finished its work in March this year at the end of a seven years regeneration programme. There are many visible and successful signs of regeneration left in its wake – the East End Pool and Library and Morrisons to name just two. The local churches have been very closely involved in this programme as part of the voluntary sector and were instrumental in forming the EECVSF which emerged from the East End partnership.

Another key piece of work that UMTP has supported is the East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group (EAASSG) which has continued its growth throughout the year, chaired by Chris Carroll. As the year has gone on this has been an important resource for local parishes that now encounter the needs of asylum seekers on a regular basis and often need advice and support themselves in the issues that arise. New premises have been acquired in Church Walk. They are known as *Common Ground* and there is a continuing need for volunteers from the local community to assist with running the clothing store and offering low-key support to clients. The Home Office Dispersal Programme to the East End for Asylum Seekers is now over three years old. Working in partnership, EAASSG is proving essential in enabling of the local community to welcome and help integrate new residents from all over the world.

Church Development

Like the community engagement task, church development has a series of ongoing objectives ranging from working with groups of Christians to develop common goals, to supporting congregations to achieve their goals, from reflecting theologically on the task of church development itself to communicating our results to those who visit from outside our context. Also, like community engagement there are a number of vital projects that cross cut the formal objectives. The task of church development is dependent upon the emerging results of an engagement with the community. One reason why we seem to be making good progress on these projects is that so much groundwork has already been done from which we have been able to build.

Two projects have been important in the context of St Michael's Byker Parish, where the church development worker is now based. The first is the establishment of St Michael's Centre at Raby Cross in the centre of the Byker Redevelopment. On Advent Sunday 2002 the congregation temporarily left St Michael's Parish church and began to worship in the Old Bakery (most recently a fruit and vegetable shop). The shop front opens out on to the square to Raby Cross and worship is fully visible through the large windows. The centre is open during the week – Monday to Thursday from 8.30am (prayers from 15minutes) to 10.30am and 3pm to 4.30pm – and the local

community is invited to drop in for a drink, to use the computer or simply to chat. There is a drop in for asylum seekers, run by Roman Catholic Church's St Cuthbert's Care which members of the congregation and others from local churches support each Wednesday afternoon. The congregation at St Michael's have started a club for infants and junior children – Just Kidding – on Thursdays after school. St Michael's Centre is a place where unpredictable things happen and where a quite different model of being church is under exploration by the congregation.

As the congregation at St Michael's have left the parish church a wider consultation in the community about the future of our St Michael's Mount site was completed and also a feasibility study by the church's architect on the future of the building was conducted. At one level, the results were very positive and encouraging – there was strong local support for the continued presence of a worshipping community on the site, for the building to be made available for a wider range of uses and the potential of the site for re-development, with its splendid and exciting views over the quayside was revealed. However, the consultants advised the setting up of a partnership group with a large representation from the local population to take things forward. The working title of the Project was *Byker to the World and the World to Byker*, reflecting the new plural context – ethnically and religiously - that Byker now has. After a number of meetings a process has been established for the setting up of the St Michaels' partnership, a development trust that is independent of the PCC but which will work alongside the PCC to stimulate new building work on the site in a way that serves the needs of the emerging Byker community.

Another project is the re-development of St Silas', Byker and the church development worker has continued to work closely with the wardens and the PCC to make the vision for re-ordering a reality. The partnership with Byker Bridge Housing Association has deepened, as has the sense that St Silas will become a centre for hospitality on the Shields Road, enabling the church's ministry to be available throughout the working week, amidst the social and economic regeneration that is happening there. The re-development will have a particular emphasis on working with vulnerable persons who are at risk of exclusion from the good things happening through regeneration. It will also enable the church community to re-capture its historical links with the trading community on Shields Road.

The work that the project enables and supports in St Silas' parish and St Michael's parish is a good example of the way that UMTP was set up to work – enabling a parish to articulate its realistic hopes and goals, actively supporting the parish in moving forward in new ways and being alongside lay people as they take the first steps in a new model, and doing this from a community framework established by an engagement in regeneration. There is a great deal of ground to travel yet, but progress to date indicates much upon which to reflect.

Theological Training and Education

In many ways the theological training and education area is less developed at present than community engagement and church development. This is because the local church's engagement with the processes of social and economic regeneration, the building of new forms of church presence and the interaction between the two activities form the context in which theological training takes place. In our first application to the church urban fund, made in April 2000 we said this:

....the 'first act' of training is seen to the training of local persons, both within local congregations and the wider community. The ethos desired by the Project is that the training and education of visiting students will emerge naturally from the development of the life of the local churches. The context for training will be a Church that is engaged in the local community, involved with the development of its corporate life and reflecting critically upon it. The hope is that 'learning communities' will begin to share their learning with others who are subsequently drawn in – the 'second act'.

This still acts a vision for us towards which we are working. Our placements students and visitors this past year – two from Cranmer Hall, two visiting clergy, 15 Industrial Mission Chaplains, and quite a few others - have experienced a little of this goal and there is clearly much further to go as we put new structures in place during the coming year.

The Future

At the annual meeting each member of staff will outline the future of the areas for which they are responsible. Each of the areas - community engagement, church development and theological education and training - is growing and the coming year will need to be one of continuing reflection as to the longer-term future of UMTP. The project staff and the management committee have already reflected hard on this and there are a number of options before us. Project staff will raise some of these issues in their presentations tonight. It is likely that when we report to you this time next year that we will be recommending significant changes in the way that UMTP is managed and works.

Thanks and New Member of Staff

The staff wishes to thank the management committee for its support, Bishop Paul for chairing it and the Area Dean Canon Michael Webb for the support of the Deanery. A particular thanks to Canon Geoff Miller and to Mrs Chris Carroll who have been members of the management committee for a couple of years, and before that of the steering group that set UMTP up. Also, to thank Mrs Jennifer Ross for chairing the Parishes Advisory Group and for all the members of PCCs who have contributed so much to the growth this group has shown over the year.

It is a great delight for the existing project staff and for the deanery to welcome the Rev'd Sue Faulkner as priest in charge of St Silas and also as UMTP staff member for local ministry. Sue was licensed just a few days ago and has the responsibility for developing the contribution that local ministry groups might make to the life of the local church.

Peter Robinson
Director, UMTP

20th May 2003