



***Urban Ministry and Theology Project,
Newcastle East Deanery***

Annual Report 2003-2004

12th May 2004

This is the fourth annual report since the commencement of UMTF in September 1999 and the final one before the project is formally reviewed by the Bishop of Newcastle. A small group is being appointed to enable the Newcastle East Deanery together with the parishes to prepare for the next phase of the project's life, taking into account the progress made so far and the several options for the future. The group, which will be chaired by the Area Dean Fr Kevin Hunt, will begin their work in June this year and plan to report back to the bishop in the autumn. They will want to talk with the parishes and others who have

The style of this report is fuller than in previous years in order to allow staff members a chance to reflect upon progress made and how the future might develop.

Community Engagement

The middle of 2004 sees local elections, the results of which will be important for discerning the context the project will work within in its next phase. There are many anxieties about the activities of the BNP and we welcome the recent intervention by our North East Christian Churches Together. Due to these and other factors, Jeremy Clark-King writes that,

‘overall this has been a very frustrating year with delays on a number of fronts. There has been delay on the plans for the redevelopment by Places for People. There has been no decision taken about the form of the area structures of the **Local Strategic Partnership** (a decision that should have been made last September). These two major delays have meant that a lot of work has to be done in an interim fashion, with great uncertainty about the outcomes.

There have also been disappointing failures in gaining grant income for the **East End Community and Voluntary Sector Forum**. We are exploring alternative ways of carrying out the work that is needed to create a stable infra-structure for the third sector.

Having said that, much has been going on in all of these areas. Members of the local churches have been fully engaged in discussions around future developments in Walker. We are also working to ensure a similar level of engagement in Byker in the design competition being launched there.

The **Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy** is being written as we meet and the Project, through the EECVFS has played a large role in the Interim LNRS Steering Group to act in partnership with the Area Director, the Community Empowerment Fund and the East End Partnership to create a strategy that bears some resemblance to the needs of the local communities of our area. The LNRS is vital as it is the basis for the distribution of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for the next three years.

We are involved, through the **East End Partnership** in the ongoing support of our communities in relation to the LNRS and the whole Newcastle Plan. Also with the EEP, we are engaged in setting up local provision for training

specifically for local people in the many trades that are going to be need in the massive developments over the next 10 to 20 years.

We have also contributed to the training of several community workers in the East End and to the provision of activities for children and young people.

The Project continues to support the work of the **East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group** which is going from strength to strength and doing very important work in the face of increasingly draconian legislation.

The detail of the projects will be reported in the relevant sections, but there is major engagement with our communities coming out of the work in Church Development around St Silas, St Michaels and St Martins. St Martins especially is showing the fruit of a relationship we have built up with Sure Start over the last four years.'

Church Development

Many of the projects that UMTP has initiated take time to produce visible results. As we look back over the last year we can see quite number of pieces of work reaching a stage where everyone is aware of a significant step forward.

- **St Anthony's** has been trialling the DIY Kit for Estate Churches, an education toolkit for church communities seeking the next step forward in their parochial lives. It has been highly appreciated and has enabled many ideas to be formed about ministry in the Walker Riverside Area. It is being followed up, together with some ideas from the Springboard week at a parish day conference.
- At **St Martin's**, the community survey has been completed, St Martin's Centre, a partnership between the church, the community and Sure Start has been formed and fundraising has commenced for a new church building that will incorporate a children's centre and community facilities. Meanwhile rear of church has been refurbished for a wide range of activities with young children and their parents delivered through the local Sure Start partnership and for a young persons drop in.
- The **Aspire** Partnership was formed at the end of February 2004, having over 70 signed-up members and a full management committee. Aspire will work in partnership with the PCC of **St Michael's** to re-develop the whole site. An English Heritage grant has been obtained for the repairs to the roof and this signal the re-development of St Michael's Parish church
- The building work is well underway at **St Silas**, creating an office for Byker Bridge housing in the north aisle, a worship space that opens out onto the Shields Road and full-facility church hall that will be used by among others Age Concern. The residential block will be started in the next few weeks. The church is now fully visible from Shields Road after the demolition of the buildings opposite.
- The **Creating Sustainable Church** project was inaugurated when Captain Steve Dixon was licensed in July 2003 to the Byker parishes with the support of the

Church Army. He has been based with St Michael's congregation and has begun to build links with the other project parishes with a view to developing a network of pieces of work across the Byker area with which he is involved and contribution an evangelistic dimension.

- **City Information Technology Academy (CITA)**, a charitable company in its own right has now been launched and is beginning to serve the voluntary sector through an employment project that offers experience and training.
- **St Michael's Centre** continues to flourish during the week, particularly with the number of children who attend, both informally and at The Crew on Thursday afternoons. There is an increasing number of volunteers and new initiatives are being tried, such as the Healthy Easting Lunch club.
- The Deanery has been talking with the church wardens of the upper three **Byker Parishes** about the difficulties with the current pastoral reorganisation and thinking about the possibilities for the future. It is planned that ideas for the way forward in formal pastoral terms will be developed over the summer and be available for full discussion in the autumn by the PCCs.

Each staff member has a particular perspective on the project's contribution to the church develop programme. So John Sadler reports, reflectively:

'The advantage of starting a new role is that, generally speaking, there is time to think about what is meant by it, what the role is, what might be initiated under the heading of the role and so on. Two and half years later that luxury seems no longer to exist – and it feels as if we hurtle along trying to keep up with all the many developments which are taking place, many of which come about not as a result of careful planning and tight control but simply as a result of working in different ways and exploring partnerships within the community and the city.

But one thing that becomes clearer as day passes day is that it is impossible and inappropriate to develop just one model of church. Even in Byker, we are working with a number of models - although a particular one which seems to be emerging is a model which incorporates within its buildings and its life (both in terms of what it does in practical terms as well as in its prayer and worship) a particular area of ministry and mission (whether it be children, or homeless and vulnerable people, or the well-being of a whole city community). Another model is the model which is developing under the heading of the Urban Ministry and Theology Project.

What seems to us to be most important, however, is a willingness to be open to all the different and new possibilities which inevitably present themselves if we are prepared to have the courage to think laterally and creatively – and never to stop asking questions! This is what we are trying to do Byker – and I do believe that our increasing knowledge and expertise has the potential of not only being of some use in the east end of Newcastle, but also to a wider constituency.'

Sue Faulkner, who has been leading on the development of **Local Ministry** for just one year now, comments:

‘Over the past twelve months I have been developing an overview of the position of Local ministry in our project parishes and beyond. This has meant getting to know the very different characters of each church group and exploring where their ministries currently lie and where they may grow over the next few years.

It is clear that each parish has a very distinctive future largely developing their buildings for expanded use but also in the case of St Anthony’s in shaping its ministry to the rapid changes in its local area, particularly relating to housing regeneration. The DIY Kit has helped them see some opportunities for their future and indeed areas in which Local Ministry may develop.

St Martin’s already has a Local Ministry Group which is finding its feet and exploring what the new pattern of LMG has to offer which is distinctive to their long experience of pastoral and lay ministries. Here there is a wealth of experience to be shared but also a rapidly developing context which may need new thinking and skills. The future plans bring many fears and expectations which the LMG will need to steer the church through.

St Michael's has a developing successful ministry through its outreach at St Michael’s centre. There is increasing local community contact through the openness of this centre. There will be future discussions as to how this ministry will compliment any developments of their Church site up the hill. Aspire has been formed with a creative mix of church members and local residents. There are new skill and opportunities to be explored in the life of this project too. St Michael’s has many diverse aspects to its ministry which need continued support to provide continuity rather than fragmentation.

St Silas’ will at any time be returning to its remodelled building. This has taken the vast majority of people’s energy in the last year. There are still careful negotiations to be had in sustaining and developing the partnership with Byker Bridge Housing Association. There is also a small group meeting to look at a variety of potential uses for the new building, which has the possibility of becoming a small LMG in the future.

It has become increasingly clear to me that there are very diverse styles of LMG. In this diocese and that it is important to see which style will be most appropriate in any one context and any one time. Broadly speaking LMG’s fall into two categories, those who adopt a managerial style which has strong structure and formality, and those who are more loosely associated with the business of a parish but take on the role of envisioning possibilities, and steering directions for ministry. Both approaches are valuable in different situations and indeed a LMG may find that it needs to move between the two styles at different times. The role of the mentor is also one that can take several forms. Some mentors become very closely involved with the group and some sit much more at a distance to provide an “outsiders” view.

For our context here there needs to be a balance between these approaches. There will be much “business” in the partnerships to be undertaken, there will be a need to have an overview and critical analyse of the context, there is a need to be able to dream the possibilities not just worry about the problems and there is a need for new skills to be encouraged amongst congregations who are just rediscovering their valued contribution to their communities.

There is a need to sit lightly to some of the structure of LMG’s and to allow the creation of such groups to come from the image and experience of the people of these parishes. There is always the tension between taking time to nurture and grow lay ministries and the demands of a rapidly changing context and world.’

Captain Steve Dixon describes his first nine months living and working on the Byker Easter:

‘Creating Sustainable Church is a relatively new UMTP project and recognises that church in the Byker area is not currently sustainable. Now nine months in, the project is developing slowly through discussion and reflection on the current state of the church in Byker, particularly St. Michael’s.

Various themes have come to light including how to be church in the midst of a culture of dependency, where many rely on the State for their income and housing; the creation of a committed worshipping community in a place where few have any formal commitments in life; the interaction between daily life and meaningful worship; an approach to evangelism which answers the questions people are asking.

An empirical approach has been adopted in order to explore the theories discussed. For example, the lunch club Food for Life aims to reach people in the 25 to 35 age group who have a poor diet. The initiative is designed to tackle a specific need which has been identified after listening to the needs of people using St. Michael's Centre as a drop-in. Food for Life encourages the participation of those using the group from the outset, involving them in the running of the group and its future direction. Daily worship takes place straight after the meal and can sensitively pick up on any issues discussed over the meal table. It is hoped that Food for Life will lead to spin off activities such as CPAS's basic Christianity course ‘Start!’. Food for Life embodies many of the principles of the Creating Sustainable Church project where a process of listening results in a specific area of mission, opportunity to belong/commit, and an integrated form of worship.

A document is in the process of writing which will be published in the form of a booklet aimed at exploring the major themes of sustainable church and providing some practical guidelines for the creation of a sustainable church.’

Theological Education and Training

There have been some important achievements in the past twelve months in which the capacity of the project to deliver theological training in context has grown considerably in scope. This has increased the income base of the project significantly

- **Industrial Mission Chaplains** in training visited the East End of Newcastle in June 2003 for a day conference focusing on the role of the church in local economy and regeneration. As before this was a successful event and
- UMTP hosted a **Pastoral Studies Unit** for Cranmer Hall in June 2003. Students visited our churches and lived in East Newcastle or Central Gateshead in June 2003. They were able to enter into the lives of quite a number of local projects and take the time to reflect with each other on the demands of ordained ministry in the contemporary city. The group of eight included two Methodist students. In 2004 this course will be repeated.
- **Theology in Context**, a module in urban theology is currently being taught for the first time on the Newcastle Diocesan Readers and OLM Training Scheme. This module is validated by Durham University through the North East Institute of Theological Education. It is a 13 session module that will enable students to develop the skills they need to make the connections between their pastoral activities and their theology.
- **Theology in the City**, a module for the MA in Theology and Ministry at Cranmer Hall was taught for the first time in the autumn term. Students based in Durham travelled to Byker on Thursday afternoons and engaged with the theology of urban theory and practice through visits to our church development and community projects. This will be an annual fixture in our
- One interesting event was the visit of 15 undergraduate theology students with their lecturer, studying theological ethics at **Durham University** to Byker. They spent an afternoon experiencing the estate and thinking about issues to do with social exclusion and its relationship to poverty.

Peter Robinson writes about the theological training activities of the project:

‘The style of teaching on taught courses that we have adopted has several features. The first is that although I have been the module leader in each case, each member of the project staff has taken part in the sharing and reflection upon our experiences. Secondly, we combine closely visits to real situations in ministry with guided reflection. A common pattern is that students would read up on an area beforehand, experience the reality and the people firsthand and then wrestle with questions about the presence of God in the situation. Thirdly, the training that we offer is integrated into the life of the whole project, the parishes and the local community. We have made quite a bit of progress in this area over the past year, but I would like to see more people take the opportunity to talk informally about their experiences to our visiting students, because its in sharing that we grow in our own understanding of what we are doing and thinking.

There are some very exciting prospects in front of us. It is the way that the theological education and training activity of the project can interact with both community engagement and church development that gives UMTP a significant contribution to make to our church's exploration of how we might effectively train our current and future ministers in working in the local context. If it was not for the careful and often hidden work of community engagement then we would not have the capacity to offer visits to local projects and enable visitors to have the chance to reflect with key local people and professionals working on regeneration. Equally, if we were not working on the development of the shape of the local church then we would not be able to offer practical experience of making the links between the community and the growth of the church which is an issue of national importance. The visits we have from students, whether they last for a day or a couple of weeks give us all an opportunity to learn from their experience and incorporate their insights into our own learning. Another interesting prospect is that we might be able to build an urban retreat centre with residential accommodation on the site at St Michael's, given the variety of possible uses through the Aspire partnership.

Conversations with Cranmer Hall are still continuing about forming a more formal relationship with UMTP. During the past twelve months there have been endless discussions about the future of ordination training throughout the Church of England. One conclusion is that there will be a Regional Training Partnership covering the 'greater North East region of England' and it is in this context that we hope a relationship with residential ordination training will be forged. My hope is that network of contributors across East Newcastle and Central Gateshead might come together to enable theological training in the urban setting to take place effectively. This will widen the opportunities for reflection that we can all offer and allow us all to learn from a wider geographical area.'

Conclusion and Thanks

The project staff would like to convey their thanks to all who have supported their work in the past 12 months. First of all to Hazel Juggins, our administrator whose two year post came to an end in October last year. We are still extremely grateful for her copious work and ability to organise us effectively. Thank you to Jennifer Ross who has chaired and guided the Parishes Advisory Group over the first few years of its life but who has now 'retired'. Then to Canon Michael Webb who ceased to be Area Dean early in 2004 and who was part of the original steering group. At the same time we welcome Michael's successor Fr Kevin to his new role. We are grateful to all those who have been committed to the Management Committee during the year and especially to Bishop Paul Richardson for his chairmanship. Finally, a word of thanks to our CUF funded evaluator, Professor Hilary Russell whose evaluation of the project is about to come to a conclusion – for her guidance and critical support.

UMTP Staff Members
12th May 2004