

Urban Ministry and Theology Project, Newcastle East

Annual Report, 2004 to 2005

The inaugural meeting of UMTP took place in May 2001 and this is the fourth annual general meeting of UMTP.

The annual meeting this year will focus on the reviews of the project carried out by Hilary Russell on behalf of the Church Urban Fund and that carried out on behalf of the Bishop of Newcastle by the Area Dean, the Rev'd Kevin Hunt, Canon Adrian Dorber, Canon Geoff Miller and Mrs Karenza Passmore. The staff wishes to record their gratitude to the Project's reviewers both for their encouragement but also for their insights into the new way of working that UMTP attempts to embody. The annual meeting today represents a key moment in the life of UMTP which was set up for five years. We all have much reflection to do as a result of our experiences since the autumn of 1999 and particularly in three areas: the enabling of our Byker Parishes to take together a Mission Initiative, the setting up of a Centre for Contextual Theology and the development together of Local Ministry. In addition it is recommended that UMTP's staff develop their way of collaborative working to include more space for reflection and writing.

The reception of the reviews, reflection on what is said and decisions on how to respond are the responsibility of us all. To help us in that each member of the UMTP staff has contributed to this annual report that takes each of the project tasks in turn and introduces the way it has development over the past twelve months.

Community Engagement

There have been some important developments in the community engagement area during the past twelve months, mainly around the shape of the voluntary sector and the regeneration on the Walker Riverside.

At the beginning of 2005 the Healthworks Partnership and the East End Community and Voluntary Sector Forum came together to form the East End Community Development Alliance. Each organisation retains its own identity yet the view was taken that it would be more productive to work together, each bringing its strengths to the partnership. This means that the Healthworks' emphasis on building the capacity of local community and voluntary sector groups through the training of linkworkers can be complemented by the Forum's emphasis on the same sector's involvement in regeneration. At the time of writing it is early days but a successful funding bid has enabled the appointment of a coordinator and an administrator to support the Alliance. One of the tasks that the Alliance now has is to work towards an integrated voluntary and community sector support organisation here in the East End. This will take some time, perhaps a couple of years, yet in the meantime the Alliance will provide an effective vehicle for collaboration and reflection.

The regeneration on Walker Riverside continues to make significant progress. In the autumn of 2004 a community enquiry was held and church members were well represented the key participants. The philosophy of the enquiry was straightforward: 'Tell me I will forget, show me and I'll remember, involve me and I'll understand' and

it may well be that we are seeing a movement in regeneration policy in the city from consultation to involvement. The signs are good and the impression that we gained from taking part was that to a large extent those of us who are local residents were involved in shaping the future design of the East End and were listened to carefully. Jeremy Clark-King spent much of the week in the Lightfoot Centre engaging with a highly talented design team and the facilitators. The report from the community enquiry will be made public.

Since the autumn the Walker Riverside Partnership Board has been formed and local residents and voluntary sector and community groups have appropriate representation on it. At the time of writing Board's terms of reference have been agreed and it is getting to grips with the way of working required. This will require training for all the participants not least of all in the language of urban design and planning. The board meets every couple of months and will continue to do so for quite a number of years to come. Regeneration is a long term project and there is much to do along the Walker Riverside. What is so important is that local residents and local groups are able to participate fully in the design and implementation of regeneration and the community engagement role is committed to playing its part in enabling this. We will, together with our partners, need to find ways of increasing the capacity of the whole community to take difficult decisions, support our representatives and speak clearly about matters of justice and common concern.

Another major piece of work for the community engagement role has been a continuing involvement in the East End partnership as it assesses the way forward in the light of many changes to local governance. The structure of area governance in the light of the Local Strategic Partnership is still something to be determined. The church has been involved in this process and I know that this particular activity occupied much of Jeremy Clark-King's time and that he played an influential role in where we have already reached in the East End.

There is much more to say of course about our involvement in other partnerships and projects see particularly the comments about the Byker Design Competition below. We have continued to support projects that have received finance from the Church Urban Fund and staff members have carried responsibilities as directors and trustees of some of these.

Church Development:

The past year has been a full one for church development strand of the Project's work and it forms the majority of this report.

Sustainability

The Rev'd John Sadler writes this year on the theme of sustainability, one of the key themes of the whole of the church development area.

'Sustainability' is a buzz word which is being used more and more amongst the decision makers of funders and local authorities; but the word is also coming to be used in church circles.

In Byker, of course, we have the 'Creating Sustainable Church' project, but this project is not the only one which is about sustainability; the Urban

Ministry and Theology Project itself, working within the four Byker parishes, is also about sustainability - as should every faith community be.

Maybe some would say it is too simplistic a thing to say – but I guess the closer we can get to discerning the mind of God, the closer we can get to sustainability. In fact it seems to me that if we can accurately discern God’s way for us and obediently carry it out, then, by definition, that way has sustainability built in (bearing in mind He may be calling us to allow those things that aren’t sustainable to die!)

The challenge here, of course, is to discern what it is that God is calling us to be and to do. Some would want to claim they have no problem with that, others would be much more reticent to make such a claim; but the fact that the church, as we know it in this country, does struggle so much suggests to me that we really haven’t got it anywhere near right. And, because God is a God of surprises, I suspect that one of the reasons we haven’t got it right is because we are reluctant to ‘think outside the box’.

I know that others might want to argue that the reason we struggle so much is because we do think outside the box – and if only we could return to orthodoxy, then we would be ok! But what is orthodoxy and who determines it?

With all this in mind, the work of church development continues in Byker. We, by no means, claim we have got it right, but we are exploring a variety of different ways of being which may provide us with some answers. Our trouble, however, is that we don’t have a great deal of time. In ten years time, on current trends, there will be very little left of the church in some urban areas - so our work is urgent!

*In Byker we are working in a number of areas - but a particular principle we are following is the idea of a much more ‘connected’ church where each faith community has a very particular focus of ministry and mission. **St Michael’s** work with children at the St Michael’s Centre on Raby Cross is growing and developing – and is beginning to spread out towards the parents of the children and other adults; **St Silas’** connection with Byker Bridge Housing is leading to a development of a ministry with homeless and vulnerable people, and **St Martin’s** plans for a new centre, which will respond not only to the needs of families with young children but also older children, young people and adults, are now beginning to take shape and the building programme has started. **St Anthony’s** new situation without a vicar is helping them to face up to questions about the future and the place they will take in a newly regenerated community, and **Aspire’s** plans to redevelop the site of St Michael’s Church in Byker are moving forward with contractors shortly to start on repairing the roof – a site which we believe will make a significant contribution to a regenerated community. And the **Community IT Academy** is continuing to grow and develop with a particular ministry to long term unemployed.*

But are all these plans sustainable? It is a good question and one which we have constantly at the forefront of our minds – particularly bearing in mind that for faith communities to be sustainable they must be sustained. Oddly,

however, we suspect that the two have a great deal to do with each other, and, bearing in mind the adage 'it is in giving that we receive', I know that many people are feeling energised and sustained by feeling that they are not only recipients of God's love but also involved in doing God's work in the world of persuading others that they too are loved.

Developments in Local Ministry

Sue Faulkner writes this about the progress that has been made with our commitment to explore and develop patterns for Local Ministry

Over the past year I have been acting as mentor for the Local Ministry Group at St Martin's. This has been a foundation year for them to begin to understand what the role of a mentor might be. My role has been to join group meetings and to observe the dynamics of the group and to begin to identify areas for development and growth. The church community itself has been undergoing a radical journey in its decision to redevelop the building by demolition! As such the role, of the L.M.G. has been one of supporting the congregation emotionally through this time, acting as a support for the P. C. C. of which they are mostly members anyway, and sustaining the vision amongst the laity. There have been discussions and reflections within the group about how best it could assist the transition to the school, and maintain the good contacts and relationships with the groups who currently use the building whilst they are more dispersed. It has been identified within the group the key points of contact with the community and how some of the "accidental" conversations can take place when sharing facilities which lead to good relationship and deeper appreciation of each group's activities. The group has also taken on roles as individual members in baptism visiting and preparation very much under the direction and guidance of Peter.

This group has already identified that an opportunity has arisen in moving to the school for Sunday worship. It provides a chance to look at developing the lay peoples' involvement and exploring what will work in the future rather than simply trying to transport old habits into new contexts. This may be in the areas of choreography shaper and style of the liturgy. I am hoping that this will begin to be addressed in the near future especially with a view to providing skills and tools which can be used once the rebuild is complete and the new worship space is in use.

The other parishes are still at varying stages in development of local ministry schemes. There are many skills and activities that the people of St Michaels' have been using over the past year. Members of the church are learning greatly about the complexities of a modern community in Byker, one that does not instinctively share Christian values. The negotiations through the Aspire partnership mean that people have to tackle some very hard and challenging issues and they are growing as a result of this. As such there is a growing basis for a more formal Local Ministry scheme developing although it is unlikely to resemble the one at St Martin's as the context and areas of ministry are different. St Silas' have had very good discussions working from the DIY Kit which John and I lead over Lent. There have also been the beginnings of some fruitful discussions between the church and the other partner organisations that gather in that place. Other individuals are also exploring

the possibility of extending their ministry skills. There are now more people engaging in public roles in the Sunday service and within this patch work the possibility of a formal Local Ministry scheme is becoming much more possible. I envisage this to have a distinct pattern of hospitality and gathering as well as vision for the retail environment around the church. The P. C. C. has agreed to spend one of its meetings soon to look specifically at Local Ministry.

There is no progress to report at present on my dream of specific Local Ministry Group developing for the retail, and work environment of the Shields road. Much as I would like to progress this quickly there are many dimensions possible and I wish to explore the ecumenical aspect too. There are contacts developing with the Community Fire Station, (which may at some stage be completed) and also with the Police Station. In this way the LMG should have a focus that is “non-domestic” so to speak.

Creating Sustainable Church

Steve Dixon has been with us now for nearly two years. With his family he moved on the Estate at a time when there were some signs of hope after a few years of disorder and distress for many local residents. It was a time when the number of vacancies on the estate was rising to its highest level since it was built.

The life of St. Michael’s Centre feels to be moving forward particularly through the development of a new style of worship which is being held each month. This is a ‘split’ service which begins with a short said Eucharist. This is followed by a coffee time before a short all-age Service of the Word. There is still the feeling that this is experimental, but that in itself seems to be creating a sense of energy within the worship and makes it far easier to invite new people to join us. The congregation continues to grow numerically and our worship space feels increasingly cramped. Contacts with other community groups feel to be bearing fruit as the reputation of the Centre grows. A level of the trust developed between church and community is apparent in the increased number of children attending the drop in sessions with some of the parents/carers starting to become involved.

*It would have been hard to have missed the recent political impact of the Jamie Oliver school dinner programmes and the subsequent discussion surrounding **Healthy Eating**. However the healthy eating lunch club, after showing promising signs of growth, failed to attract a consistent group from our original target of 25-35 year olds. Lessons have been learned through this experience, and although is still the feeling that the principles behind the scheme remain sound it appears to be better to work with an existing group rather than trying to create a group. With this in mind coupled with an increase in the number of children attending out after school drop in, a decision was made to redirect our energies into a healthy tuck shop for the children. The idea for this new venture came initially from a sense of annoyance at having to clean up sweet wrappers and sticky finger prints from every corner of the St. Michael’s Centre after each session. Some informal research showed that for a significant number of children the responsibility for their diet is not taken up by their parents/carers but is left in the hands of the children. So working in conjunction with local child nutritionists we have developed a healthy alternative to sweets which encourages the participation*

of the children in food preparation. In time it is hoped that the children might prepare meals to which they can invite parents/carers.

*The **Creating Sustainable Church (CSC)** project has been bubbling away; the principles explored by this project being tested out in the practical life of St. Michael's Centre. An example of this is the decision to end the Food for Life lunch club after it failed to reach its targets. It might have been possible to come up with some laudable reasons for continuing this project and to deny its failure, but one of the main principles of CSC is to let go of what is dead or unproductive in church life and move our energies into areas of growth. The current findings of CSC have been written into a couple of discussion papers which are in the process of being combined into a possible Grove booklet.*

*The southern area of the Byker Estate has been earmarked for regeneration and an **Urban Design Competition** is currently underway to decide on the new shape of the estate. The long term future of St. Michael's will undoubtedly be effected by the significant changes to the community this redevelopment will bring. These changes will certainly bring difficult decisions for St. Michael's to take concerning meeting space as well as ministry to those whose lives will be disrupted by the loss or change of homes. However, the regeneration of the area will offer us opportunities to reach out to the new people who will move into the proposed 300-400 new houses and the possibility of a new building with closer links to other projects and neighbourhood resources. These are exciting times for us to be church in Byker.*

Steve has preached at St Gabriel's and St Francis' during the past year and will preaching at Christ Church shortly, something that embodies the intention in his job description that his learning might be shared throughout the Newcastle East Deanery. He also is involved in planning a project designed to develop the deanery's involvement in its secondary schools. .

Theological Education and Training

During the past year project staff have taught on two Durham University validated modules – the urban theology module for the MA in Theology and Ministry that is taught locally and the urban and contextual theology module for the OLM Scheme and Readers Course here in Newcastle Diocese. UMTP also hosted six students from Cranmer Hall for two weeks as part of the pastoral studies programme. Industrial chaplains spent a day with UMTP staff looking at regeneration in the local economy.

The Project Director has been active in conversations between the Dioceses of Newcastle and Durham. These conversations will in due course lead to the formation of a Regional Training Partnership in the North East and it is hoped that the experience that UMTP is building up in the area of theological education will be able to inform more widely the training of people training for all categories of the church's ministry.

Theological reflection is key for us all as we try to share the learning that we have gained in the Byker and Walker context and this has taken place not just in the visits that people make to see us but also in the invitations we get to contribute to events others organise.

- All staff members took part in the National Estates Network conferences in London and in Rotherham in the autumn of 2004
- John Sadler and Steve Dixon presented a paper at the Urban Theology Unit's annual seminar on urban theology on the theme of sustainable church.
- Peter Robinson was invited to become a part of the Church of England's Urban Policy Consultative Group MA urban theology.
- Sue Faulkner and Peter Robinson took part in a presentation to people from Local Ministry Groups in the West End of Newcastle who were participating in a module in collaborative ministry.
- John Sadler and Peter Robinson attended a day conference in Glasgow run by the Scottish Bible Society to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Conversations a method of Contextual Bible Society.
- Steve Dixon and Jeremy Clark-King attended a conference on Re-Neighbouring run by the Commission on Urban Life and Faith in Birmingham.
- Peter Robinson gave a presentation to a meeting of the Core Cities Theological Network in Manchester. following on from similar events in Newcastle, Sheffield and Liverpool .

People

The Rev'd Jeremy Clark-King moved to become the Rector of St Martin's, North Vancouver in January 2005. We wish to record our best wishes to Jeremy and his wife Ellen, also a priest in the Church of England, as they move into a very different and exciting situation. Jeremy's five years with St Anthony's and as staff member for Community Engagement was full of interesting experiences and its very much due to Jeremy's commitment to complex projects that the voluntary sector (ourselves as churches included) is in such a good position for future development here in the East End.

Richard Whittaker who was the business manager of the Total Learning Challenge based in the East End of Newcastle resigned from the management executive in December. Richard has been a much valued supporter of UMTP for some years now and we will miss his contribution and wish to record our thanks to him for his work as Treasurer.

Kath Renforth has become our administrator just a few weeks ago. We welcome Kath to her new role – 3 days a week with CITA and two days a week at Partnership Building with UMTP.

Finally, our thank you to those who have served on the management executive and who have freely given up their time to be involved. Also to Bishop Paul Richardson who has chaired the committee.

Peter Robinson, Director

23rd April 2005