

## **PROFILE OF THE PROJECT IN URBAN MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY, NEWCASTLE EAST DEANERY**

The Project in Urban Ministry and Theology commenced in September 1999. The Project offers an innovative style of working across a regeneration area in the East End of the City of Newcastle. The Project is not understood as a 'project' in the conventional sense, but as a dynamic process that enables a vision for the community and the churches to come into being. Central to this process is the Project's work in three distinct but related roles - community engagement, church development and theological education and training.

The Church Urban Fund (Development Fund) has confirmed their interest in the strategic nature of the Project with a substantial grant from 2000 to 2002. The grant is to be used to finance the structures of the community engagement role and contribute towards its activities.

This brief paper outlines for potential candidates for the church development role the background to the Project, its vision and its aims and also a description of each of the three tasks.

### **1. The Background to the Project**

The Project has emerged from five identifiable strands in the life of the local church. The first is a diocesan strategy for mission and ministry in its urban parishes. Elements of this strategy have included an Inner-City Commission appointed in the early 1980s, the establishing of the Churches Regional Commission and the Churches Reaching Out to People (CROP) Fund. More recently, in 1997 Partners in Community Action was set up to capitalise on the experience of financing community projects within the Diocese and to extend strategic thinking in this area.

The previous Diocesan Synod, after extensive consultation with parishes and deaneries, approved a Deployment for Growth paper. This included mission statement that contains two relevant statements. There is a commitment by the Diocese to ensure 'worship, service and evangelism in each community' and there is a desire to see Anglican Christians deepen the connection 'between faith and everyday life'. The Project in Urban Ministry and Theology is an outworking of these two principles in the Byker/Walker area of the inner city of Newcastle's east end.

The second strand is also related to the diocesan strategy, which has given the deaneries an important role in determining the future shape of the church and its ministry. The deanery is seen as an important unit in encouraging local identity and interdependence. The Newcastle East Deanery has responded to this

challenge by the formation of clusters between independent parishes in the various areas of the deanery. Without the background of cluster-formation and working through the issues of clergy collaboration across parish boundaries the Project would not have come into being. The ownership of the Project by local congregations is due to it being a natural outworking of this process.

The third strand that may be identified is the church's involvement in the social and economic regeneration programmes in the east end of the city since the mid-1980s. The article in appendix three tells the story of this and involves both Diocesan personnel and clergy who have served in the area. Currently, through the ministry of Canon Bob Langley, the church is closely entwined in the structures of the Ouseburn Partnership and the East End Partnership.

These two partnerships are having a considerable impact on local life, yet they are only part of a climate of regeneration across the city of Newcastle and indeed throughout the North East region. Newcastle City Council has published two key Green Papers – *Going for Growth: A Citywide Vision for Newcastle 2020* and *Community Planning*. The church is represented on the Newcastle wide working group entitled 'Community Support and Capacity Building' presently preparing for the SRB (Round VI) bid. ONE NorthEast has introduced its regional economic strategy and there is increasing cooperation across the River Tyne between Newcastle and Gateshead authorities.

Each of these initiatives is a stimulus in the fourth strand of the Project's origin – the need for the local churches in the east end of Newcastle to allow their corporate lives to be shaped by this abundance of social and economic change. There is a pressing need to 'regenerate' the life of local congregations, recognising that there has been a significant decline in church attendance over the past decade and that its buildings are also in a state of decline. Given the Anglican Church's current involvement in social and economic regeneration it is important for this activity to be coordinated across the regeneration area. Hence the Project's geographical coverage of the parishes of St Silas' (Byker), St Michael's (Byker), St Anthony of Egypt (Byker), St Martin's (Byker), Christ Church (Walker) and St Oswald's (Walkergate).

The final strand is a need that is perceived for those on formal courses of both initial and continuing theological education. Currently in the North East the theological training community is undergoing a re-shaping of its many relationships and the present emphasis on the production of university validated modules offers new opportunities. There is an opportunity to introduce to students urban theology, formed in the Church's involvement in the ferment of social and economic regeneration. There is an opportunity to make the learning undertaken locally available in appropriate forms to be shared on a wider scale.

The context of social and economic regeneration and the questions that relate to the overcoming of social exclusion through the deployment of central government

finance require a good deal of theological reflection. The theological investigation of the language, concepts and practices of 'regeneration' is a priority. There is opportunity in the pursuit of an urban contextual theology to acknowledge and reflect on the remarkable range of new developments occurring in the North East. The Project's hope is that it will contribute to a wider learning process, out of its particular experience of the exploration of 'spiritual regeneration' with the local churches of the Byker/Walker Basin.

## **2. The Vision of the Project and its Aims**

The outcomes of the Project, or its vision statement, is that the local church might be such that:

- Existing groups of Christians are growing in spiritual depth, numerically and in theological awareness.
- New forms of Church presence and mission are emerging.
- Local Christians are developing models of ministry that arise directly out of the context of social and economic regeneration.
- There is a strategic and economic use of existing buildings.
- There is a stimulating interaction with the communities of the East End and appropriate partnerships are being established with both statutory and voluntary agencies.
- Theological students and clergy share in the learning gained by the local churches and make a significant contribution.
- Theological reflection on the urban context takes place against a background generated by the interaction of all these factors.

The Project therefore may be regarded as having twin aims. They are related to each other and are mutually stimulating. They are:

1. To enable, resource and support the regeneration of the local churches within the context of physical, social and economic regeneration.
2. To offer training to lay and ordained persons on formal programmes of preparation for Christian ministry in the skills required for theological reflection and ministerial practice in the urban context.

## **3. The Tasks of the Project**

In order to fulfil these aims, the Project is to work in three distinct areas – community engagement, church development and theological education and training. It has been agreed that three staff members are to be appointed, each contributing half their time to achieving the Project's objectives. Each member of the Project staff will develop knowledge and skills in one area of the Project's

work. This will account for the second part of their dual role ministries, the first being their commitment to leadership in a local worshipping community.

Peter Robinson (appointed Priest in Charge of St Martin's in September 1999) has assumed the training and education role and directs the Project. Jeremy Clark-King (appointed Vicar of St Anthony's in January 2000) has assumed the community engagement role and the third appointment (related to St Michael's, Byker) will take on the church development brief. Each staff member will work with the full objectives of the Project in mind and will take on subsidiary responsibilities across the full range of activities.

When the three staff appointments are finalised, each person will provide the necessary leadership in one of these roles. Leadership of each role across the geographical area of the Project will involve working with the other staff members but collaborating with and drawing into the processes a whole variety of others. Therefore, 'the Project team' is understood to be an inclusive and flexible structure yet one that has focused resource and leadership under each particular role.

Each role is subject to continue revue and evaluation, especially through the involvement of external consultants. Soon after the person responsible for church development is appointed, then a complete revue process of the role – its aims, objectives, key tasks and relationship to the two other roles will be defined. The involvement of the new post-holder will be central to the definition of the scope of the church development role.

Arrangements are currently underway with Newcastle City Council's *East End Community Development Team* and East End Partnership to share office space within the community. A suitable site in a central location is being investigated. This will witness visibly to the partnerships in which the Church through the Project is seeking to engage. Project staff will work alongside personnel involved in the routine activities of social and economic regeneration. It is hoped that this will contribute to the model of ministry being developed, not least in the location of the local church's prophetic voice. It also offers stable premises for the Project's lifetime, something that church buildings currently cannot offer.

### **3.1 Community Engagement**

The first task of the Project is to coordinate the work of the Church of England in the local communities of the Byker/Walker Basin. To have the structures in place that can take an overview of the East End will enable the gaps in the church's involvement to be located more effectively, both in terms of geography and social sector. A mutually profitable working relationship has already been established with the Methodist community development worker, and consultation with the other churches is perceived to be integral to the task of coordination.

Key to progress in this activity of coordination is the relationship with those structures that, like the Project, reach across the Byker/Walker Basin. The Project would seek representation in appropriate structures and, at the very least sustain, regular contact with those who also take this overview. Given the staffing structure of the Project, relationships can be maintained at several levels concurrently.

The task of coordination will take several forms. First of all, Project staff aim to promote the work of the Church in projects that directly address questions of social exclusion. There is a proliferation of such schemes, not untypical of such an inner city area. There is a need to have an overview of the church's overall involvement in this sector, to develop a strategic approach to initiating further projects and to assist in the equitable distribution of resources.

The organisations that have considerable Church investment, in terms of effort and finance are (*Church Urban Fund involvement is indicated by an asterisk*):

- *Greater Walker Community Trust* (the elderly) \*
- *Byker Advice and Information Project* (all East End residents) \*
- *Kids Kabin* (primary school children) \*
- *Walker Open Learning and Fitness Centre* (training)
- *John Boste Youth Centre* (teenagers)

Other structures in which individuals from the churches are either represented or formally appointed include:

- *East End Partnership*
- *Ouseburn Partnership* \*
- *East End Voluntary Sector Forum*
- *Thomas Gaughan Centre*
- *YMCA*
- *Healthworks East*

Secondly, the Project relates to work of the local authority in a strategic way across its geographical area. The publication in June 2000 of a Masterplan for the East End of the City has suggested some far-reaching social and economic changes, but in a way that has left many residents and professionals feeling uneasy. Through the structures of the Project the church has been able to play a constructive and significant part in the wider consultation process. This has included the organisation of consultation events for local churches to think about the implication of *Going for Growth* for their own corporate lives.

Relationships are being built with local authority staff from the Community and Housing Directorate. This Directorate is reaching the end of a re-structuring exercise. Now, there is an approach to the city based on the concept of 'area

management', supported by an 'area committee'. At present the precise content of the structures are unclear. The Project's own structures – working at a number of levels in the East End simultaneously – means that the churches are equipped to work strategically in this new context. The 'Outer East Area' will be the four political wards coincident with the area of the East End Partnership and the Project in Urban Ministry and Theology – Byker, Monkchester, Walker and Walkergate.

Thirdly, the East End Partnership has formed a *Voluntary Sector Forum*. A Steering Group in which Church personnel are involved in key positions currently oversees it. It aims to empower the voluntary sector by encouraging meaningful consultation with local communities experiencing social and economic regeneration and by promoting participation by local residents in its member organisations. A dedicated community development worker is to be appointed to enable these aims. The Voluntary Sector Forum is currently enabling its members to engage in a critical assessment of the City's regeneration proposals and exploring the possible models of partnership available to work with the Local Authority.

Finally, Project staff are involved in establishing links with some key pieces of work aimed at overcoming social exclusion. Three in particular may be mentioned:

- The Churches have become active partners in activities relating to *Health Action Zones (Healthworks East)*. The advent of *City Action on Health* and progress in the East End towards the formation of a *Healthy Living Network* have been important developments. The recent formation of a Partnership Board (with strong church representation) and a successful first bidding round have been recent achievements. Application to the second stage is imminent. One of the features of Healthworks has been the joint training of local persons and professionals alongside each other.
- The churches have recently been invited to become involved in the East End *Sure Start* bid, led by *Barnardos* and three other Family Centres. The *Sure Start* boundary cuts across the Byker/Walker basin and raises key issues about the processes of inclusion. The bid offers the Church a chance to think strategically about its own work with children and especially the availability of its buildings for related initiatives.
- The *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* programme is one of the central elements in the citywide SRB VI bid. Given its emphasis on those who have dropped out of formal education in disadvantaged areas, there are opportunities to integrate this programme into the projected growth of employment opportunities along Riverside and on the Fosseyway extension to Shields Road. The geographical coverage of the Project means that the church could play a key part in the development of a co-

ordained delivery plan over the East End bringing together community centres, churches, schools and clubs.

A key task for the Project's community engagement effort is making the work described above available as a resource for theological reflection. This may be in the form of written 'case studies'. As important, is the student visit or placement that would lead to sustained theological engagement. Enabling this type of experience to occur for students, so that they learn alongside both local persons *and* professionals, is a crucial role. The Project aims not only to facilitate the involvement of local church members in the partnerships currently being created, but also to develop theological reflection on the processes being invoked. Given the holistic understanding of health, children and employment being promoted in the three examples selected, the theological themes available for reflection promise to be fruitful ones.

### **3.2 Church Development**

Alongside the coordination and deepening of the Anglican Church's contribution to the local community, the Project's second task is to promote the development of existing groups of urban Christians. Development is perceived to involve a variety of aspects located in the area of growing new church members, the nurturing of faith and discipleship and the relation of these aspects to the visible shape of the church's life.

One key issue is the place of evangelism within the urban Church. Evangelism is understood, primarily, to be the constant re-orientation of the Church's life around its baptismal character. *On the Way*, published in 1995 has attempted to relate Christian initiation to the social, cultural and historical context of the Church. Its exploration of evangelism, based on the principles implicit in the *Book of Common Prayer* is crucial to any discussion of the nature of growth in the Church's life. In the inner city, and the Byker/Walker basin is no exception to this, the numbers in our worshipping communities are not only low but also on a continuing decline. This raises acutely the question of mere survival and in doing so presses the issue of the future shape of the visible church in the inner city of Newcastle.

As the third staff member develops this task, it is to be recognised that the Byker/Walker basin already offers an exploration of different models of being the Church. Within the six parishes, a variety of Anglican worshipping traditions already exist. However, it is also hoped that the area will offer the opportunity for practical experiments with new ecclesial modes. The third staff member would be expected to network with others on a regional national basis that are also involved in developing new ways of being church in the urban context. It is too early to identify all the precise headings under which this exploration may take place, but three strategic examples of church development can be indicated:

1. Project staff have worked closely with the congregation and the community of St Michael's in order to understand the needs of the parish, so that the third appointment to both the parish and the Project may be made. Early in 2000 the congregation committed themselves to a process of research and reflection, with a view to clarifying the profile of the parish, identifying opportunities for the growth of church life and linking these with the wider needs of the Project. The accompanying job description was agreed with the Parish through this process.
2. There is a possibility for a church plant to be made at the southern end of the Byker Estate. The Raby Cross area is a central thoroughfare, but quite severely disadvantaged in terms of community provision. There is a need to investigate means of maintaining the Church's visibility in this area. One social need identified is health care and it is being hoped that the local church's involvement in *Healthworks (East)* might lead to partnerships being established that would facilitate this.
3. The development of the East Quayside continues and it is possible that the residential component may be extended further along the river towards Walker. In densely packed accommodation consisting of privately owned flats and town-houses, there are questions of accessibility for voluntary organisations and in the Church's case, the provision of pastoral care. An opportunity is available to explore the possibility of a quayside ministry that reaches across parish boundaries, without resolving the important tensions that arise as a result of having, in the same parishes, areas of relative wealth adjacent to areas experiencing social exclusion.

Intrinsic to this exploration will be reflection on the many possible relationships between the Church's community engagement and the life of faith in the worshipping congregation. The variety of these responses and the possibilities that may emerge from current activities offers a fertile ground for learning about new models of the church's presence in the inner city. An important part of this task will be encouraging local congregations to reflect on their experiences, so that the corporate shape of the church's life may be related to individual lives of discipleship and that the learning gained by local persons may be shared effectively.

A key part of church development is developing the use of existing church buildings. Already, each congregation is seeking to respond to the current climate of social and economic regeneration through its use of buildings.

- Christ Church, Walker – a scheme is renewing the very large churchyard, through grants from the East End Partnership.

- St Michael's – there are plans to convert the nave of the existing church building into special needs housing. Under this scheme the large chancel would be converted into a centre suitable for weekly worship and opportunity to serve the local community. Other buildings on the site, the vicarage and the verger's house are to be brought into a development plan for the whole of this strategic site at the heart of the Byker Estate.
- St Anthony's is involved in the renovation of its buildings though significant grant aid. It is also concerned with creating an 'openness' to the existing building through suitable environmental landscaping.
- St Silas – in 1999 a feasibility study was carried out with a view to its conversion into a Diocesan Administration Centre. Proposals for this have been considered and rejected by diocesan structures. The Church's engagement with the Shields Road is perceived to be the way forward for seeking a solution to a large and under-used building.
- St Martin's is located at a strategic crossroads, adjacent to the commercial centre of Welbeck Road. There is a large site, but the buildings need significant adaptation to enable use by local community organisations. The congregation are beginning to think through the implications of their geographical situation.

### **3.3 Theological Education and Training**

The second formal aim of the Project relates to the training of lay and ordained persons who are undertaking formal theological education programmes. Therefore, the third task of the Project is to enter into partnership with existing providers of theological educational and training to offer modules relating to the urban context.

However, 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'.

Thus, the ethos that is being promoted is that local persons regard themselves as colleagues in the provision of this training. The staffing of the Project enables one of the dilemmas of the urban training situation to be explored in a novel way. The collaboration between staff members is aimed to alleviate either of two dangers.

The first is that students merely observe a situation and then reflect theologically. The second is that students, for understandable reasons, 'de-skill' local people in any activities they undertake. The work of the Project staff in the tasks of community engagement and church development provides a structure whereby students may work appropriately alongside local persons on existing programmes. The probability of this actually occurring is increased by the existing collaboration between the training staff member and the two others.

It is important to clarify the distinction between training of local persons and those (including local persons) who are training for the various categories of the Church's ministry. Although distinct, these activities are related. The former is regarded as prior to and necessary for the latter. The latter is also regarded as a stimulus or catalyst to the former. The nature of the interaction between the activity of theological education and the two other tasks of community engagement and church development is of major interest. It is the thesis of the Project that handled appropriately, a synergy may emerge. This is an area of research that may require a greater period of time than the timetable of the Project allows.

The training of laypersons for informal lay ministry and the education of local congregations is the responsibility of the parish priest. In an under-resourced area, the Project's role will be to support this process. The objective will be to enable congregations as they explore the meaning of 'spiritual regeneration' for their corporate lives and also for individuals. It is planned that the Project will develop appropriate education and training packages, involving a variety of delivery methods. This activity may well involve partnerships with existing Diocesan advisors. The Project would hope to support them in their own training roles and to contribute significant dimensions of the Church's urban experience.

A number of initiatives are currently being taken in the training area:

1. A partnership has been formed with the Religious Studies Department of the University of Newcastle. In the academic year 2000-01 project staff will be responsible for the delivery of a module on the MA in Applied Theology entitled *Regeneration: Theology and Practice*. The teaching will be university based, but will include a day conference in Byker/Walker.
2. Training opportunities are being taken up by a member of Diocesan POT and also the national Industrial Mission induction course.
3. Informal conversations are being with a number of training providers, exploring possible partnerships. These include the Newcastle Diocesan OLM and Readers Training Schemes, NEOC, and members of the Cambridge Federation.

4. The current staff of the Project have attended a *Service Learning* conference at Whitelands College, Roehampton Institute. This has provided a model for understanding and managing the learning that can take place during a placement with a social institution. This has led to reflection on how the Project might create placement modules in partnership with theological training providers, integrating the practical aspects with structured theological reflection.

Future areas of work are indicated below:

1. It is proposed that a system of *Think Tanks* is created. These would provide links with clergy and lay people, across the North East Region. These groups would gather periodically to take stock on key themes in urban ministry. For instance, three potential themes are:
  - The practice of urban regeneration
  - New forms of Church in the urban context.
  - The worship and liturgy of the urban Church

Diocesan plans for Diocesan CME in 2000 have indicated four emphases for clergy training – leadership styles, evangelism, theological reflection and partnerships. Clearly each of the *Think Tank's* indicated above would provide opportunities for training under these headings. Given this link, CME finance might be available to the Project to facilitate these groups.

2. Consideration is being given to the appointment of *Associate Staff* who would supplement, on a part-time basis the work being carried out the Project staff members. This would this deepen the theological reflection that could be offered to participating students and provide a variety of approaches. It is envisaged that discrete modules may be offered. In addition to the module on regeneration described above, the modules offered may include, *The Discipline of Contextual Theology* and *Developing Spirituality in the Urban Context*.
3. Resources from the Project will be made available on a website to be constructed in late 2000. Interested parties will be able to consult online a description of the Project's aim, papers written by the Project staff, a bibliography on regeneration and, it is hoped, material for distance learning.

## **6. Management Structures**

The shape of the Project's management structure is in the process of being worked out. To date there is a Parishes Advisory Group (PAG) and a Steering Group.

The roots of the PAG lie in two processes. First, the Ministry and Mission Group of the Deanery when it initially considered cluster formation, and secondly in consultations with individual parishes as plans for the Project became more concrete. The PAG met first in July 1999 and has evolved its own structures. Now, the five parishes involved have nominated three representatives from their PCCs to attend PAG meetings. In addition, the parish clergy and ecumenical observers attend.

The aims of the PAG are to coordinate the work of the Project across the churches of the Byker/Walker basin. Key to this is creating a shared ownership of the Project's ethos and so enable the churches to play a full role in the development of the Project's aims and objectives. PAG will receive reports and share the concerns of the parishes. The emphasis will be on communication and discussion, combined with elements of theological reflection. It has now met three times and aims to meet three times each calendar year. The PAG is currently chaired by the Rural Dean. There are plans to introduce a lay convenor.

Alongside the emergence of the PAG, a Steering Group took shape, having its first meeting in the summer of 1999. Meeting every couple of months it has overseen and guided the initial phase of the Project. Staff members of the Project attend the meetings. Its members include representation from two denominations, from Durham Diocese as well as from Newcastle Diocese. Care has been taken to ensure that the members of the Steering Group are acceptable to the members of PAG. It is chaired by Canon Bob Langley, *Newcastle Diocese Director of Ministry and Training*. Other members are:

- The Rev'd Colin Carr OP, *Theological Consultant to the North East Churches*
- Canon Hazel Ditchburn, *Rector of Blaydon and Rural Dean of Gateshead West*
- The Rev'd Jennie Henshall, *Methodist Superintendent, Tyneside East*.
- Geoff Miller, *Newcastle Diocesan Urban Officer*
- Bishop Paul Richardson, *Assistant Bishop of Newcastle*
- Professor Nick Sagovsky, *William Leech Professor of Applied Theology, Newcastle University*
- The Rev'd Michael Webb, *Rural Dean, Newcastle East Deanery*

The relationship between the PAG and the Steering Group is evolving. The PAG receives advice and direction through the chair and through the staff members who attend both. The Steering Group has been involved in setting the shape of the PAG. Three future developments are planned in the management structure.

1. Each member of staff is to set up a reference group to encourage and advise on the main task each carries. The three reference groups on community engagement, church development and training will meet at

least twice per year. They will provide support for each staff member and assist with reflection on key tasks.

2. It is anticipated that a *Churches Forum* will be established to allow consultation and discussion with a wider group that the PAG would allow. It is envisaged that this group will involve members of the wider community, including local residents and professionals.
3. The Steering Group will cease to exist at the end of 2000 and will yield to a Management Group. By this time the Project will be formally constituted. The composition of this group will include members of the steering group but also representatives from local congregations and from organisations in the East End. The responsibility of this group will be to monitor the progress of the Project against its stated values and the desired outcomes.

Further documentation is available on request. A map is attached of the parishes in the Byker/Walker Basin.

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