

# Spearhead June/July 1990

## From the Rector, Christopher Frith

During the last year, a good deal of thought has gone into improving the structures of our churches and, in particular, the pattern of my own ministry. As I wrote in the Feb/March issue of Spearhead this year, we enlisted the help of Administry to help us. We defined our need this way:

"St. Thomas', Brampton, together with its daughter churches St. John's, Walton and St. Peter's, Holymoorside, require help in the formation of an administrative structure and staffing plan which will improve the effectiveness of the church, which is undergoing transition from a 'big small church' to a 'small big church'. The structure must lighten the load currently borne by the clergy."

John Truscott, who is the national Co-ordinator of Administry, spent a day in the parish. He helped a small group to think out what we mean by 'effectiveness' and together we hammered out the statement: "we see the body growing and moving forward, with all members playing their part, using their gifts and properly co-ordinated". This statement is our vision. It talks about growth and progress, the active involvement of every member, and the vital need for good administration. All this is based on the conviction that we are the body of Christ here.

The second, closely related, achievement of John Truscott was to help us to sort out our priority aims in order to fulfil this vision. In broad terms, we identified three levels:

1. Loving God and loving each other.
2. Teaching/learning, Caring, Outreach.
3. Administration.

"In this way", John Truscott says, "administration is seen as serving the activities of teaching/learning, caring and outreach. These in turn serve the prime aim of loving God and each other, the most important commandments in Jesus' teaching." This gives us plenty to think about and work on for a long time.

We have now received the interim report; a further visit from Administry will, we hope, take things further. It is encouraging to read:

"Your difficulties are quite understandable in the light of your present structure (three worship centres, seven Sunday Services, etc.) and, more significantly, recent change and growth (to a strong preaching ministry and emphasis on group work, leading to a significant growth in numbers and a much wider age spectrum in the congregation)."

The PCC are looking at the recommendations, which are summarised this way by John Truscott:

- 1. Determine the Rector's priorities**  
I suggest how this can be done effectively.

- 2. Pastor your pastor**  
Although support is given by individuals, it would be helpful to have a small group, perhaps evolving from the present 'think tank', to meet regularly with the Rector to pray and act as a sounding board for ideas. They would have no executive responsibility.

- 3. Analyse how work is currently shared out within the staff team**  
This would be a good moment to check how work is shared among the clergy. It may be possible to make improvements.

- 4. Extend the Rector's work through a new staff appointment**  
I believe you need another staff member, but am not at all convinced that this is the moment to appoint a youth worker or someone responsible for another department of church life. In your present circumstances you should be strengthening your foundations, not adding extra storeys to the building.

My proposal is that you consider an appointment that would extend the work of the Rector and his wife; and so my thinking is along the lines of a Personal Assistant. I have in mind a competent and mature person who combines secretarial gifts, who could man a church office when established, and who could work alongside members of the congregation to help everyone find their right area of service. This may be one full-time person, or the work shared between two part-timers.

## 5. Set up a training programme for the congregation

Although adding work in the short-term, you need a training programme of some kind to prepare many more people to take on responsibility within the church.

## 6. Aim to establish a proper church office

There is an urgent need for this and would like if possible to think further with you over where this could be sited.

## 7. Set up an executive group to prepare business for the PCC.

I said I'd keep readers posted! I continue to do so. In the meantime, please pray that God will show His way.

P.S. Incidentally, a year ago I produced a frantic picture of "a Stretched Rector". The picture now is of a "apprentice juggler", much happier but dropping some of the balls from time to time!

**Christopher Frith**

# Holy Week Drama

**(A personal reflection, by David Smith, on the 'Presentation of Scenes from St. John's Gospel' by the St. Thomas' Drama Group.)**

Year after year the great festivals of our Faith come round. Each, with its own collage of words, music and images, proclaims the incredible. To the Christian believer nothing seems more incredible than what happened in the last week of Jesus' earthly life - that is, unless sheer familiarity numbs our awareness.

It is doubtful, however whether anyone witnessing the dramatic presentations during Holy Week could have experienced such numbness for long. Words, lifted and sometimes paraphrased from Scripture, ceased to be just words, however familiar, as they took on flesh. In a sense, it was our flesh because we were there and we were involved. The gestures, the facial expressions, belonged to us; the pride, the confusion, the fear, the hatred, the guilt, the grief, the struggle to grasp the incredible, were all ours. This was no mere presentation; this was participation, visual, audible, mental and spiritual.

Because each evening's episode was set in the context of worship and meditation, mind, emotions, spirit and bodily senses were all taken up. What a free way for the Spirit was there!

No two people, of course, responded to the same thoughts in the different episodes. **Yet I personally can still vividly recall:**

**Monday** • From '**Jesus Coming**', the plaintive but persistent refusal of John the Baptist to take the limelight. "No, I am not the Christ", "No, I am not ..", "He must increase but I must decrease". What a humbling challenge for me to put Christ Jesus foremost and to quench my own ambitions of importance!

**Tuesday:** From '**Jesus Giving**', when, having fed the five thousand, Jesus said "I am the bread of life ....unless you eat my flesh ..", there was that rasping voice which spat out "Eat his flesh - how disgusting!". We may no longer feel disgusted by the words of Jesus but oh! how reluctant we are to admit our constant need for his life to be in us. "Take, eat and feed on him by faith in your heart." Do I?

**Wednesday:** In '**Jesus forgiving**', with whom did I most closely identify in the episode about the woman taken in the act of adultery? Was it with those who condemned with such lofty self-confidence or with the one who withheld judgment? Was it with those who said "You have sinned" or with the one who said "Go and sin no more"? Why is it that to see faults in other people and point them out often gives an unworthy satisfaction, while to forgive calls for more than I can freely offer? Indeed, "let him who has never sinned throw the first stone".

**Thursday:** In '**Jesus Serving**' I was shown a new dimension to his suffering. The intolerable physical agony has always been appreciated. The intense spiritual struggle to keep trusting his Father's will, this too I have recognised. But oh! the agony of Jesus' frustration that even those closest to him just could not understand what his dying was to mean. What a miracle has to take place in me before the crucifixion has any real meaning for me personally! Am I just obtuse, Lord, or is there something, of me that is getting in the way? "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see...". How true!

**Good Friday:** In '**Jesus Dying**' I just could not get away from thinking how very, very close Jesus was to being released. If only Pilate had stood firm; if only Peter had stood firm; and if only I can stand firm, then Jesus will never be 'crucified afresh'. But every time I back off from resolute discipleship, there is a sense in which he dies again. Pilate gave in for what he saw as good reasons they always are good reasons, or are they?

**Easter Sunday:** After '**Jesus Rising**', I asked myself, why is it we sin think ourselves to be so intellectually effective, so rationally sound, so modern, when we doubt the physical resurrection of Jesus? It came out so plainly that they were just the same. They were not gullible half-wits, ready to believe anything. It was just as demanding for them. They stood right where I stand. It is all absolutely incredible by every human standard - it always has been. But Jesus says "Reach out your hand, Thomas....Only believe. Lord, help me to believe; you don't ask any more from me than that.

So, all or most of the words **were** familiar, but the presentation certainly was not. Perhaps it was for that reason that the impact was so great. Many thanks to all who took part and worked so hard in preparation. Especially we acknowledge the enormous spiritual contribution they made to our preparations for Easter. That is all the drama group wished for, I am sure.

**David Smith**

## **A Sad Farewell to the Ratcliffe Family**

At the end of July, The Ratcliffe Family are moving from our Parish to Harpenden. Hilary and David with their children Nicholas, Anna and Laura will leave a big hole at St. Thomas'. Hilary's mother, Muriel Cholmeley, is moving with them, which will enlarge the hole even more.

We thank them all for what they have meant to us and pray for them to settle quickly in their new home, community and Church.

## **The Missions to Seamen**

### **Serving the Lord....by serving beer?**

"I work in a Seamen's Club near Marseilles?"

This statement always requires further explanation. It's not the sort of thing you hear everyday, especially from a "vicar's daughter". But it is true. For the past eight months I have been living in Port de Bouc near Marseilles, working for the Missions to Seamen as a Chaplain's Assistant at the Seafarer's Centre here.

May be you knew that already, but no doubt the question comes to mind - "But what exactly can a young girl be doing in a place like that?" and moreover "WHY?". I get asked this a lot by the hundreds of seamen of many nationalities who visit the Club. Well, I decided to take a 'year out' before starting University, and came across the Missions to Seamen, who take on about twenty students each year to help out in their Seamen's Club around the world.

So, in September 1989 I found myself arriving in a strange country surrounded by strangers, with no idea about what I'd let myself in for, only to find to my cap it all my luggage had been lost in transit (it was to reappear three months later but that's another story). Another shock was the realisation that I was going to be expected to cater for myself. Not being the most experienced of cooks, I found this prospect rather daunting and spent the first couple of days bursting into tears over negligible things like jam pot lids refusing to open.

That first week was a very testing time, and a time when I was particularly aware of having to depend entirely on God to get me through each day. I clung dearly to Psalm 139 v 9-10 "...if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" and survived to testify that it's true.

The Seamen's Club is open every evening between 6.00 and 11.00 p.m. We have a mini-bus that goes out to ports (up 50km away) to collect seamen who want to spend an evening away from their ship. It's rare that the ship stays

more than 48 hours in port, and most of them are berthed in the middle of an industrial desert miles from anywhere remotely interesting. At the Club we have a bar, small shop, telephones, money changing facilities, stamps, TV, snooker and most importantly –a friendly atmosphere. It's somewhere they can come to relax, have fun and talk to somebody other than their fellow crew members.

Increasingly, the seamen are coming from third world countries. A third of all who visited the Club last year were from the Philippines. There are also many Koreans, Chinese, Indians, Turks, Yugoslavs, Greeks, 8,880 seamen from 80 different countries in 1989.

It's not an easy life. Many ships now have 'flags of convenience' which basically results in the seafarers having very few rights and ambiguous contracts. Only yesterday we had some Filipinos seeking help against the way they are being exploited by their Greek employers: unpaid overtime, long hours, discriminating treatment, unfixed holidays...it's always the same story. We try to get them in contact with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) but today it's difficult as it's a Bank Holiday and the ship is leaving this afternoon. We hope the ITF will meet them at their next port of call. Even so, the seaman knows that there are many risks involved in complaining. It's likely he'll be put on a black list and have great difficulty when seeking employment in future. And meanwhile the 3 families he tries to support back home go hungry.

Despite all this, an evening at the Seamen's Club is not a miserable occasion. It often ends up with a cheerful singalong with guitars. Whatever the colour, nationality or religion, there's no discrimination here. A man is a man is a man....

"But why are you helping us?" asks Mustafa, a Turk, when he learns that I am largely unpaid for the work I do. "Most people hate seamen". It's not easy to explain, but hopefully by practically showing we care and realise he's a human being like any other, he will get the message that it's God's unconditional love for all men which motivates us.

Thank you all for your prayer support - it's much appreciated. I'll be here for another 4 months and I've a feeling they're going to be the hardest, what with the scorching sun, cloudless sky and Mediterranean beaches just down the road....working evenings does have its advantages.

**Ruth Frith.**

## **Building Fund, 10% Given Away**

As is normal practice with the giving in our parish it was agreed that 10% of the income from St John's extension Gift Day should be given for mission. A small committee, two from St. John's and two from St. Thomas' were asked to look out for likely projects, at home and overseas.

It was felt that as the money had been given for building, a project involving building would be right. After studying several worthy projects both in Chesterfield and overseas, two were selected: A Tear Fund building project in Lima, and a project at Holmewood in the parish of Heath.

### **The Holmewood Project**

The parish covers two district areas: A quiet, picturesque and peaceful little residential village at Heath where the Parish Church is situated and a much larger ex-mining/industrial village at Holmewood.

Bernard Sproston, the vicar, and his wife live at Heath but much of his flock and concern is in the Holmewood area.

There is a small mission church right on the main street, St. Albans, and it is here that the project is planned. Due to major pit closures in the recent past and the likelihood of other local pits closing, the village has high unemployment and the worst urban deprivation in this vicinity. There are all the problems normally associated with this condition and great need of help and support.

The church wants to play an active part in meeting these needs. The plan is to upgrade the Mission Church buildings which are lacking in facilities and are in poor condition. The main hall/worship area 'is a wooden structure and the rest of the building is brick-built. They hope to set up an office for a part-time community worker who would work on specific needs, e.g. debt counselling and implementing a credit union (a self help loan system). They envisage the

church having a much greater presence in the local community, with the clergy and buildings being more readily available to the parishioners.

It is possible that the Church Urban Fund would half-finance the part-time worker (who would be a practicing Christian worshipping in the parish) if the local church could fund the other half. The area needs all the help it can get, and our committee feels that our contribution will be used really well here.

Bernard has good contact and rapport with the local people; the primary school and the village community Centre, and expects this project to complement, and certainly not compete with the limited facilities available to the villagers.

There is a good community spirit, and a small band of committed and active church members who want to see Holmewood improve and grow by showing Christ's love in practical, social and especially spiritual areas.

### **The Lima Project**

We are also giving about £3000 to a Tear Fund project in Lima, Peru. Over the last 3 years Tear Fund has been supporting a project to build a Bible Institute, which is used for Training evangelists in the evening; as a medical Centre and school in the daytime; and a church at the weekends.

The building still needs a roof, which will complete the upstairs. The ground floor is already in full use whilst the building is being completed. The money we are giving to them through the Fund will enable this building project to be completed.

More details of the Tear Fund project will appear in the next issue of Spearhead. Please continue to keep both these projects prominent in your prayers.

**Alan Sheldon and Tom Humphries**