

CALLED TO THE LAITY



by

Peter Bunker

MODEM Occasional Paper 6

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Peter Bunker played a key role in Modem's founding (see p15). More generally, he writes of steps he could take as a lay person, which would have been more difficult for an ordained minister (eg p12). We are glad to have this opportunity to make this personal memoir available to a wider readership.

Tim Harle
Vice-Chair, Modem



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Foreword

Some of those with whom I have worked in recent years in Chichester approached me, as has my family, to place on record things that I have done, besides my regular job as a family solicitor. After my time at Cambridge University (1948-51) my experiences there, and some of the things that have happened since, illustrate how I have been used, as it seems to me, to serve the Kingdom of God on Earth. These have been in ways which have been surprising, challenging but encouraging and they have borne out what I believed at Cambridge, namely, that where many of my friends there were being called to the ordained ministry or to the mission field, I was 'called' in just as true a sense, to be a layperson in England.

Inevitably because of the pattern followed here, this will be my own account and it will relate to how senior people in the Congregational Church and in the wider Churches have dealt with me. This is not an exercise in name-dropping but simply to indicate the kind of encouragement I have had, particularly when I have been, as many might have thought, 'awkward'.

Formative years at Cambridge

I went up to Cambridge after doing my National Service in the Navy, having prior to that grown up in and become a member of, Union Church Brighton, to which my parents belonged. I had been an active member of the (teenage) Youth Group in that Church, and indeed met my wife Angela there. Thus far, however, there was nothing unusual or outstanding in my religious experience. I was, therefore, somebody who had been in that Church from the beginning of his life, but I had drifted during my time in the Navy. Going up to Cambridge, the life of Emmanuel Church, Cambridge, and particularly the influence of its then Minister, Revd John Murray, together with the whole experience of Cong Soc, Cambridge University Congregational Society, brought me back in to the Christian faith, and shaped me for ever.

My first Sunday in Cambridge, I vaguely thought that perhaps I should go to Morning Worship at the Congregational Church there. I was at once drawn in by a sense of a lively worshipping community and Cong Soc seemed full of people interesting, intensely alive, and with a great sense of humour. Cong Soc met on Sunday afternoons, sometimes for talks on matters of faith from speakers visiting Cambridge or living there. When there was no talk, we engaged in the very serious business of reading Winnie the Pooh stories aloud. In addition, we went out in groups to take services in village Churches. There were also from time to time socials in Emmanuel Church Hall. Each Easter Vacation the Cong Soc Lakes Party took place, with some 30 of us tramping from Youth Hostel to Youth Hostel, taking in most of the Lake District Peaks on the way. It was taken for granted that every day we would stop on a Fell side, while each spent 25-30 minutes in a devotional quiet time.

The University Denominational Societies worked closely with the Student Christian Movement. SCM ran a 24 hour conference at Cambridge before one term began, where the speaker led our thoughts in a series of sessions on Isaiah 6. Isaiah's vision in the Temple, ending

with 'Here am I send me', made a great impression then and has remained a favourite passage ever since.

I was President of Cong Soc from April 1950 to March 1951. The only particular experience to which I want to refer here is that for the first and last time in my life I had a sense of a specific call from God to a particular task which otherwise I cannot explain. In those days student missions to particular areas were normally carried out by special organisations, normally of the conservative evangelical flavour, and organisations like Cong Soc did not undertake student missions. However, at one particular meeting of representatives of the Student Christian Movement and the Denominational Societies, for reasons which I did not understand at all at the time, because there was nothing on the agenda to produce this thought in my head, I came out of the meeting convinced that Cong Soc as such should undertake a student mission. I mentioned this idea to the Secretary, Bernard Aylett, who had been with me in the meeting, and he said the same idea had come to him. In the circumstances we thought we should pursue the idea and in due course Cong Soc undertook a mission to the town of Hitchin in Hertfordshire, based on the Congregational Church there. That included house to house visitations, public meetings at buildings other than the local Church, and various events, of course, in the local Church itself. Obviously we had a series of preparation meetings and we were told that we must have a Senior Missioner, who could lead and advise the team. We were told that the obvious choice was Ebenezer Cunningham the Senior Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge and a much respected leader in the Denomination.

Later at the time of the coronation of Elizabeth II, Ebenezer was the Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and in that capacity represented the Congregational Union in the Abbey Procession. The whole experience of the Hitchin mission was strange to most of us, and we benefited greatly from his wisdom and advice.

Hove in the 1950s

To be articled as a Solicitor in the family firm in Hove, and then to practice there, seemed to many of my friends in Cambridge a comfortable and easy option. In fact, it proved to be a very challenging situation. My Father became Vice-President of Rotary in Great Britain. As being President would involve his being away from the office for up to half the year in all, often for weeks at a time, it was planned that our other partner, Frank Sinden, in his 50s, would run the office for that time. Frank died suddenly, a day or two before my Father would be nominated as President. I in effect became acting Senior Partner for much of the year, aged 28, and two years qualified. The staff of forty rallied splendidly. I learnt to take decisions because no one else could and to stand by the consequences when things went wrong. In Angela's contribution to the booklet on the firm of Bunkers she said, 'Although I didn't realise it at the time, this was also a period when Peter developed his gift for clear thinking, his ability to get quickly to the heart of the matter, which must have been crucial to decision making within the office.'

After coming down from Cambridge in 1951, I was appointed to be a representative of Union Church, Brighton, on the Sussex Congregational Union. That was October 1953. Shortly after I became a delegate to that body, a group of people at Pound Hill, Crawley, one of the New Towns under the Government Scheme, who had been worshipping in a local Village Hall, came to the County Assembly of the Sussex Congregational Union. They said that while they represented people from many Church traditions, they had decided they wanted to be associated with Congregationalism and they asked if the Sussex Congregational Union could help them raise the money to erect a Church. The Executive of the County Union, commenting on this request, gave what I thought was a very feeble and lukewarm response, and from the back row of the Assembly I said so. Fortunately, Revd Barnard Spaul, Minister of Shelley Road Church, Worthing supported my suggestion that the matter should

be reconsidered. While it is clear that nothing would have happened if there had not been what our Provincial Moderator Revd Andrew James described as a revolt from the back row, it is quite clear, equally, that nothing would have been done as a result of my intervention had it not been for the support of Barnard Spaul. The outcome was that the County Union decided that they would respond positively to this request and set up an Appeal Committee to raise the money to build the new Church. In September 1955 I was asked to be Secretary of the Appeal Committee. Relatively soon after that I was co-opted as the Appeal Secretary on to the County Union Executive. At that point Revd Cyril Franks was Minister of Goring Church, and he and I were the two who initiated most of the new ideas. Somebody said it was like watching a badminton game, and just as the shuttle- cock was about to fall to the ground the other one, whichever of us had not hit the thing in the air for the first time, gave it another hit up and it carried on from there. Cyril Franks said that he thought one of us would be thrown off soon, because of the trouble we were causing, perhaps both, but it would be interesting while it lasted. Not very long after that I was appointed County Treasurer and Cyril Franks was appointed District Secretary and I said that from now on of course, we were both permanently on the Executive and there was not much they could do about us. My co-option to the County Executive had been in 1959. In March 1960 I became County Treasurer, continuing until March 1967.

The 1960s: National developments

In May 1961 I was sent by the Sussex Congregational Union to be one of its representatives on the Council of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. At about that time a group of us in Sussex were concerned about the life of the Churches. All of us were in fact Church Secretaries, Church Treasurers or other Officers of local Churches; we set up the Sussex Laymen's Forum, a totally unofficial group. One of the first things that we did was to discuss the question of giving in the Churches. The Sussex Congregational Union then raised extra money to send to the National Fund, the Home Churches Fund, (responsible among other things for paying our Ministers) to try and raise the amount given by the Churches nationally and hence to do something more for our Ministers. The Sussex Laymen's Forum produced a detailed Memorandum saying that giving in the Churches was un-Christian and that the Congregational Union, and through that other local Churches, should fundamentally rethink their attitudes to giving and the consequences of those attitudes.

I sent a copy of that Resolution to Revd Howard Stanley, General Secretary of the Congregational Union. He said that if I would send him the appropriate number of copies, about 250, he would send them out with the material for the March 1962 Residential Meeting of the Council of the Union. I did so and it went out with the material for the Council as he said but without comment. This resulted in a protest from some in the Sussex Congregational Union, including the Chairman and the Secretary, that this Memorandum was not anything to do with the Sussex Congregational Union and that must be made clear. When this item was reached, as a last item on a long and very full agenda, I as a very young member of the Council, had the responsibility of presenting this and felt considerable apprehension. However, Howard Stanley introduced the item, providing the official disclaimer by the Sussex Congregational Union very fully and properly and then added, 'Would to God that more people in our Churches cared as much about what is happening as these

people in Sussex do'. I went forward to present the report knowing that my case had already been argued by Howard Stanley.

I was asked to serve on the Committee chaired by Sir Harold Banwell, (by job Secretary to the Town Clerks Association), which had to devise a constitution to make possible the strategic move from the Congregational Union of independent Congregational Churches to the Congregational Church in England and Wales. This was the first time that the word 'Church' with all its implications had been used for the National Body of Congregational Churches in the Country.

I was also asked by Howard Stanley as a layman to speak at a refresher course for those who had been out in the Ministry for three years, at Mansfield College Oxford, our senior Theological College. I asked him what he wanted me to say, because this was a short week-end course. He said that he didn't mind but he thought that perhaps the Sussex Laymen's Forum would have some ideas. I did my piece and then in the bar afterwards one of the young ministers said "of course they (the Church of which he was minister) broke my wife's heart the first year". What shook me about this was that no one else reacted at all and when I commented, because I was the only layman present, I was told no, we quite understand what he means it has happened to us. Later some of the senior Ministers running the course took me quietly aside and explained what actually happened in many churches to young ministers and their wives and the expectation in many Churches, as to what wives should do. That experience has stayed with me ever since.

Early in 1964 Howard Stanley asked me to go and see him and said he wanted me to take over the Chairmanship of the Home Churches Fund, the committee (mentioned above) responsible for settling the budget for the whole denomination negotiating the distribution of that total budget between the County Unions and then raising the money from the Churches through the Counties. I said that some of us in Sussex had no confidence in the Home Churches Fund and he said he was not surprised. That was why he wanted me to stop bellyaching in the back

row and come and do something about it taking charge of the whole operation. That attitude, to somebody that many might have dismissed as a rather difficult and obnoxious young man, is typical of the kind of response there has been to anything I have offered and I think it says much for our National Leaders and the attitude of the Congregational Churches as a whole.

The work of what had been the Home Churches Fund, responsible for the whole work of the denomination within England and Wales, was extended to take in the contribution we were making to the overseas work of the Church through our Missionary Society. I chaired what became the Home and Overseas Churches Fund.

In 1967 I was asked to become the first chairman of the Training and Mission Department of the Congregational Church, responsible for most of the work of the denomination including young peoples' work, children's work, overseas advocacy and ministerial training. I went to see Revd Dr John Huxtable, then General Secretary of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, and said that I believed in the company of Christ's people committed to Him and to one another and I believed in the Kingdom of God on Earth, but my problem was with the Church itself at all levels, which very often seemed to me irrelevant and sometimes got in the way of the mission of Christians in their service to the Kingdom. He smiled his sweetest smile and said, 'Yes we knew that, that is why we want you to do the job, not because you have gifts we can use in spite of your attitude, but because if the Church does not welcome and use people with your kind of attitude, what hope have we for the future'. I served in that capacity as Chairman from May 1967 to May 1970. After presenting my final report to the Annual Assembly of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, to 1,000 people gathered in Westminster Chapel I added some personal comments. I said that my abiding concern was what many of our churches were doing to some of our ministers, the demands made and the lack of support. Many ministers thanked me afterwards, for saying what no minister could have said in the way I did.

In 1968 Revd John Reardon, with whom I had worked when he was minister at Horsham, asked me to give the 'Charge' to Church & Minister when he was inducted at St Albans. He later became General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and then Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church. A little later, Cyril Franks asked me to give the address when he was installed as Chairman of the District of the Surrey Congregational Union which included his own then Church, Purley. I was overwhelmed by the extent to which those present supported and shared in the very critical comments I had made about the Christian Church and its priorities and approach.

I was asked to give the same address in the adjoining District of the Surrey Union. Many agreed with me, but one retired clergyman rose to say that this was the most dangerous nonsense he had heard for a long time. In reply, I said that the comments to which he particularly objected were, as I had tried to make clear, a quotation from John Reardon's Chairman's address to the Sussex Congregational Union – but I had quoted them because they said what I believed, better than I could say it myself.

Congregational Council for World Mission

The London Missionary Society, founded in 1795 without any specific denominational loyalty, had become in effect the Missionary arm of the Congregational Churches in the UK and some other countries. Like most missionary societies originally the emphasis had been on sending out people from Christian England, to convert the heathen in Africa or India or wherever. Recently, the London Missionary Society had become the Congregational Council for World Mission (CCWM) in which all participating Churches were seen as equal partners in giving and receiving. As Chairman of the Training and Mission Department, I was asked to chair the Annual Conference at 'The Hayes' Swanwick of the CCWM. That year, 1969, was an interesting and challenging time because the move from the London Missionary Society to this Council involved

considerable adjustment, especially for older Missionaries who felt the loss of the sense of "the Fathers in London". The move from a Missionary Society sending folk overseas, to a Council in which the Churches would be involved, including the "Younger Churches", sharing in giving and receiving, was accepted as right in principle, but was not without its problems, both the emotional adjustment to losing the sense of the Fathers in London and the continuing relationship with those who had been sent out in its name.

The CCWM Conference at Swanwick that year was very tightly programmed, and I became aware of growing frustration among many delegates, especially since the majority of attendees were under 25. Against strong resistance from the General Secretary of CCWM and others, I insisted that there be a special session, limited to those under 25 and those they agreed to invite, at which I would not take the Chair. This enabled the frustrations to be expressed, and the mood of the whole conference changed.

The climax of the Conference was, as always, the final Communion service. The real work of the Conference was done in four workshops, each led by one of our Ministers. I asked which of them would be presiding at the Communion. I was told firmly by them that I was the proper person to preside as representing the whole Conference. Under Congregational principles, taking seriously the Priesthood of All Believers, this was right, and I welcomed the suggestion. That inner group of us tried to find a pattern for the Communion Service that would express the common life of the Conference, but knew that what emerged would cause problems for some. In the end even the critics accepted the rightness of what was arranged, and for me (as for many present) it was an unforgettable experience.

In both of the examples from the CCWM Conference that I have quoted here, as indeed in many other episodes mentioned herein, I was able to take steps as a layman which it would have been much more difficult for a minister to take.

Developments with the United Reformed Church

Looking through my papers, and reflecting on that Communion Service, I found my notes when Angela and I were asked to contribute to the Congregational Forum Swanwick in 1964, the theme of that Holiday Conference being 'Faith and Unity'. We were asked to speak on 'The Christian in the Home', as one part of the Conference emphasising that the most important piece of service anyone can render as a Christian, is the way we do our ordinary jobs. Having said that we didn't have family prayers in the traditional sense, I added that the nearest we got was perhaps Grace when one of the children says it especially the youngest Margaret. We usually have thank you for Mummies and Daddies, thank you for brothers and sisters, thank you for food, thank you for everything, Amen. The thank you for food is usually specific, and for a time the salad cream seemed to be particularly picked out. Does it sound fanciful to say the salad cream became for me the element of a sacrament?

In those days the President of the Congregational Church in England and Wales was elected based on nominations by the County Unions, and my name had been put forward, firstly by Shropshire and then by Essex, Cambridge, Kent and other places, as well as Sussex. I was not elected as president. In May 1970 I was invited by Revd Dr John Marsh, the Principal of Mansfield College Oxford, to go and preach there and stay with him for the week-end. After that service he said, 'well, since the denomination did not have the sense to elect you as its President, and I wanted to know what you would say if you had been elected, now I have had a chance to hear that'.

I served on a body called 'Commission on the Church for the Seventies' set up towards the end of the 1960s, with representatives of the Presbyterian Church of England on it, to look at various aspect of the future, including Ministerial training and use of human and financial resources, the part with which I was particularly involved.

In 1972 the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church of England and Wales came together to form the United Reformed Church. I did not serve on the Executive of the new body, the URC, though I served on the Church and Society Departmental Committee. Later by the time Revd Cyril Franks was Moderator of the Southern Province of the URC he suggested that I should serve on the URC National Executive. Having been elected, I did so from July 1977 to March 1992. The time came when I was so frustrated by the failure of that body to accept sound leadership including through its General Secretary Revd Bernard Thorogood and others, that I stood up and asked 'if I could go home now'. I said I was not frightened of standing up and speaking in public but I did not find the Executive 'a relaxed and worthwhile body to serve on because it did not trust leadership and it did not trust itself'. That intervention produced a considerable effect on the way the Executive operated. The result of that discussion was a change in certain procedures, but above all a change in tone and atmosphere, and I agreed to continue serving.

In 1994 I was asked by the URC to explore what was actually happening, Province by Province in the assessment of ordinands and to make recommendations for developing a national pattern.

Cases had arisen where late in training for the ministry, an ordinand was satisfactory academically and accordingly the theological college could not refuse a leaving certificate, doubts remained as to that person's suitability as a minister. Was the fault with the colleges, or with the selection process through the Provinces (the URC's equivalent of Anglican Dioceses)? When I was asked to undertake this as a one man 'Commission of Enquiry', the heart of the problem became clear: a reluctance to stop someone who had a strong sense of calling, but about whom there were doubts. I was asked to meet the principals and some of the staff of each of our Theological colleges, and the Provincial Moderators and their appropriate committees in certain of the Provinces, selected for me for particular reasons. From all this, and a national

consultation of all these colleges and all the Provinces, there emerged a new pattern for a National Assessment of Ordinands.

CORAT and the founding of MODEM

I had been invited by Raymond Clarke and the Duke of Richmond to join CORAT, the Christian Organisations Research and Advisory Trust. I thus became involved in helping to create MODEM - Managerial and Organisational Disciplines for Enhancement of Ministry. In particular as Honorary Legal Advisor to the Steering Group. I was involved with the constitution (accepted June 1993) and then with registration with the Charity Commissioners. From the beginning, MODEM was intended not only to bring to Christian organisations the standards and techniques of the business world, but also to bring to 'secular' organisations the vision and inspiration that Christian bodies could bring. The Charity Commissioners were very happy with the first of these aims, but it was only after considerable discussion that they agreed to the second, and to register MODEM as submitted.

Ecumenical Experiences

Meanwhile there were interesting developments on an ecumenical basis in Sussex. A year after the Second World Conference of the World Council of Churches in Evanston in 1954, Rt Revd George Bell as Bishop of Chichester, called together the first Conference of Christian Churches in Sussex, which was held at Brighton College, in April 1955. This body met every two years, it was for a while the only Countywide Conference of Churches, and over the period of its life Councils of Churches were set up in most of the towns, and indeed some villages of Sussex, but not in Brighton. Brighton was, and for a long time thereafter remained, a black hole as far as co-operation between churches was concerned. I had been sent along to the first one in 1955 as a delegate from the Sussex Congregational Union and I continued to go to subsequent meetings. One of the other delegates was Dr Guy Daynes, who was President of the Sussex Wine and Food Society, a figure on the social scene locally and a prominent local GP. He was also a very committed Anglican layman and he and I agreed that something must be done to try and create something in Brighton. We were advised that it was too early to go for a Council of Churches, which is what would have been normal, but if Brighton was ready for anything it was only for a Christian Aid Committee. It was said then that the problem was that the Churches did not trust each other, including specifically the Anglican Churches some of which were not talking to each other at that stage. In that situation I was the Free Church joint Secretary with Guy Daynes the Anglican joint secretary, and as these rather nervous and edgy clergy sat on the edges of their seats, Guy's personality and infectious laugh made a considerable contribution to our willingness to work together and trust each other. In due course Guy felt called to become Medical Director of St Lucy's Hospital, Tsolo in the Transkei South Africa. The new joint secretary was an Anglican Clergyman and when we first met to discuss the situation he shook me by saying that we ought to pray together, and as the Free Churches were better at it than the Anglicans perhaps I would do the praying. Progress was made and that work continued

though with difficulties and creating a Council of Churches had to wait many years, despite the efforts of myself and other lay people.

I learnt from George Bell to take the ecumenical dimension seriously. I also learnt from him that this meant not merely the Christian Churches working together, but their taking seriously the whole inhabited world and the “secular” organisations within it, working with all men and women of goodwill to care for the World for which Christ died.

Earlier, on behalf of the United Reformed Church, I had been part of the conference ‘Power to the People’ organised at York University in 1976 by the British Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, seeking among other issues to put the Churches more firmly alongside the poor. I was asked to chair one of the groups through which the Conference functioned, a group which included Revd Canon Stephen Burnett, of the Board of Education of the General Synod of the Church of England, and Revd Ian Fraser, Dean of the Centre of Training in Mission at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. To chair a group which included these and others of similar stature was of course very challenging but it underlined an important principle. It is not enough for someone to have a sense of calling — in my case to be a layman serving the Kingdom in the world - but that calling must be confirmed on behalf of the Church at whatever level is appropriate. The tasks I have been asked to undertake have confirmed that sense of calling.

In 1977 the British Council of Churches initiated a study programme called ‘Britain Today and Tomorrow’. I was asked to contribute to the group looking at ‘Leadership in our Society’. I quote part of my comments:

‘Human beings do need leadership and human society cannot operate without it. Because of the general situation today, authoritarian approaches are suspect, rightly so, and any would-be leader who assumes that he is entitled to exercise authority because of his traditional position will run into problems. This is

particularly difficult in the case of clergy of all denominations. Even in the Free Churches, there is a strong assumption on the part of ordained men themselves that they have some special right, almost an exclusive right, to leadership in many spheres of the church's life. Where this combines with the class assumptions of the privileged middle class, assumptions increasingly challenged in society, there can be quite painful experiences. Since the Christian church seen as a social institution is one of the most conservative of all human organisations, even more so, I think, than my own profession, the resistance of the ecclesiastical structure to change and to challenge is such that a great many potential leaders not only among the laity, but also among the best of the clergy, give up the struggle and get out.

'On the whole, the churches have not adjusted to a society, in which it is taken for granted that there should be a right to question and to confront each other in honest disagreement, trying to find a greater truth through our disagreements. Until that sort of problem can be faced, any comments on how to produce more and better leaders is really a waste of time.'

About the time that the United Reformed Church was set up nationally (1972). I found myself as Chairman of what became People and Churches Together, (PACT) the Brighton & Hove Church and Community Development Project. That exciting task, bewildering and asking of me things I didn't really understand and didn't know what I was doing, led to the creation of a body involving other Churches, the Jewish Representative Council, Local Authorities, bodies like the Council of Voluntary Service and other less "establishment" bodies and the University and the Polytechnic. The object was to see what needs of the marginalised and dispossessed in Brighton & Hove could be met if, those bodies worked together. At the time, particularly after a conference at Sussex University which launched the whole concept, a number of people said it was a splendid idea but of course it wouldn't work because those bodies would not trust each other. We knew that was the then

position, but gradually trust was created in place of mistrust and the work of Impact Initiatives, as it is now known, continues to this day with an annual turnover now of over £2,400,000.

The Board of Social Responsibility of the Diocese of Chichester had on it a representative of the Roman Catholic Church, and one from the Free Churches. I served as the Free Church representative for some years, from October 1978, because of PACT. This was an enriching experience for me, and valuable for PACT, because of the contacts this brought within the Diocese. I could have served if I had been ordained, but I was freer to make comments as a lay person'.

In the new Year Honours List for 1988 I was awarded the OBE 'for services to the community of Sussex', because of my work in helping to create PACT.

Retirement to Chichester

When I retired professionally as a Family Solicitor in Hove, having lived and worked in Hove all my life, we decided, on the initiative of my wife Angela, to move to Chichester, one of the objects being to disentangle me from being so closely involved in church and community work in the area where I was living. We moved to Chichester and I relatively soon became a serving Elder on the Leaders Meeting of Christ Church (Methodist/United Reformed). With others who were elected then, I was asked what mattered to me most far as the Church was concerned. My reply was 'What does it mean to be 'the Church' in the city of Chichester', which implied taking seriously the whole life of that City, including its 'secular' organisations.

As a result of the discussions I then had with Revd Canon John Ford and others, I was drawn in to the life of Churches Together in Chichester (CTIC). I later succeeded Father Keiron O'Brien the Priest at St Richards Church (Roman Catholic) as Chairman of CTIC. Fortunately, John Ford became Vice-Chairman, and his support and that of Keiron O'Brien were vital for the work of CTIC and for me personally.

As Chairman, I talked to Ruth MacKenzie then Artistic Director of Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT) and later Director of the Cultural Olympiad for London 2012 about possible help for the Passion Play we were planning for Good Friday in the streets of Chichester. That help was readily forthcoming and I then mentioned concern for the marginalised and dispossessed among us. I discovered that Ruth had a passion for that kind of cause, and she was invited to speak about that at the Annual Meeting of CTIC in 2004. Thus 'New Frontiers' was launched, as a co-operation between CTIC and CFT, using drama and other art skills, under experienced professional leadership, to develop personal confidence and ability to relate to others for those who needed to grow in these ways. Targeted at first at young Asylum Seekers, young Homeless, and other young people in the Chichester area in problems

with the Police, a considerable amount has been achieved over the years. The use of the “energy of creativity, local people and skills” of CFT in service of such folk led CFT to write such work into the general plans of the Learning and Participation Department of the Theatre, especially when Rupert Rowbottom came to be Director of that department. The ongoing support partnership and resources represented by New Frontiers has encouraged CFT ‘to further broaden the range of work with isolated, vulnerable or disadvantaged groups’ to quote from the report of the Theatre to CTIC at December 2009.

As Churches Together in Chichester has now been wound up the Churches’ side of this partnership now rests with Christ Church (on the initiative of its then Minister Revd George Gibson) and such other Churches as are willing to join Christ Church as sponsors – at present there are some eight Churches.

Meanwhile, I had been closely involved in helping to form the Community Partnership Project, of CTIC with West Sussex County Council and Chichester University. Building on our work together on the Government’s ‘Home Share’ Scheme, trialled in West Sussex and Oxford, this general partnership explored the problem of migrant workers in the area, producing a pamphlet dispelling some of the myths.

Closing reflections

I believe that only if clergy and laity work closely together can the Church be true to itself. Some clergy seem to think that the laity only exists to support the clergy and do what they are asked. To see 'the Church' as mainly if not wholly those who have been ordained limits the nature and activities of the Church, in all its branches. As a layperson, I was freer to question normal patterns and habits, and to assert that one of the main purposes of all the Churches is 'to see what God is already doing in the world, and go and join in'.

I believe that the role of the ordained ministry, called to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, is crucial to the life of the Church. A large part of my service to Congregationalism nationally was helping to support that ministry, at first in matters of finance and then generally, including questions of ministerial training. I also believe in those alongside, with different gifts and responsibilities, who are called to be lay people. This narrative sets out some of my own journey down that road. Someone has said that I was not merely called to be a lay person, but called to be me – that my particular approach as well as my gifts were needed in the Church as in the office. Having pondered that, I believe the point is important, that we each have to bring our particular gifts, personality, and outlook rather than trying to fit into preconceived patterns. All of us are necessary to constitute the *LAOS* the people of God. I can only give thanks to God for the opportunities given to me to serve His Kingdom, through the Church and outside it, and thanks for the rich array of those with whom I have worked and whose friendship I have enjoyed on that journey.

Peter Bunker
Chichester, 2015.

Thank you

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PJB

About MODEM

MODEM is a UK-based ecumenical Christian network, which encourages conversations and developments in the areas of leadership, management and ministry. It is an organisation in association with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). Membership is open to individuals and organisations.

MODEM has published five books with Canterbury Press. In recent years, it has organised an annual conference: these alternate between a day conference in London and a residential conference at Sarum College in Salisbury.

Members receive discounts on publications and conferences, and a journal covering the latest news, views and reviews, as well as news from the spirituality at work movement. For details about membership, visit <http://www.modem-uk.org/join.html>.



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