

REMEMBERING REVD DR GEORGE LOVELL
Thoughts from Parchmore Methodist Church and Community Centre

Contributed by
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We come today with love and prayers from Parchmore Methodist Church and Community Centre.

In *The George Lovell Interview* which George gave in September 2011, he said that “*Parchmore made him*”. Today Parchmore wants to say that George made Parchmore, too.

Collis Peart is with me today to share some of our reflections.

MINISTRY AT PARCHMORE METHODIST CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE – A STEWARD’S PERSPECTIVE

My contribution to this very special occasion is as a church member with leadership responsibilities as a steward.

How is the late Revd Lovell’s legacy being lived now at Parchmore? It is not necessary to go over his work at Parchmore because most, if not all, present here will be fully familiar with it. A key feature of the project is engagement and communication with stakeholders.

The more informed I became about Revd Lovell’s work and experience with the project at Parchmore, the more some of our actions and responses at Parchmore today became more understandable. I understood better our links with the wider local community and church members’ expectations. In practice, as leaders, we have learnt that we have been more successful in our efforts when we take the time to involve key people and communicate clearly, especially when managing changes.

The times when we have operated without full and meaningful communication in church as well as the Centre have been some of our most trying of times. While we have no written directives telling us how to conduct ourselves in keeping with the project, we still expect to be fully informed participants. For me, this demonstrates that we at Parchmore have inherited the inclusive but non-directive approach of engagement i.e., the ‘Parchmore way’. This style of working at Parchmore demands that leaders exercise tolerance and patience, have the confidence to take risks, to give and take, to try and fail as we carry out mission in the ever changing times.

Revd Lovell’s legacy has allowed Parchmore to become embedded in the community with many non-religious stakeholders and supporters. In going forward, we in leadership have a duty to continue to keep following the legacy and rise to the challenge of passing on the unspoken baton of ensuring a culture of inclusivity thrives at Parchmore.

A VOCATION OF IMAGINATION

Throughout 2018, Parchmore Methodist Church and Community Centre celebrated 50 years of community partnerships with neighbours, clients, volunteers and ministers who are friends of the project, but Collis’s reflections indicate that the longevity of the Parchmore Project is not inevitable. We have felt that quite keenly in the closure of Parchmore Pre-School last year. Yet what George has described as the “*Parchmore Way*” has infused an approach and a commitment that continues to transform a Methodist church’s presence on a corner in Thornton Heath, one of the 10% of the most deprived areas in the country.

Travelling back to Thornton Heath by train a few weeks ago, I was musing over the convergence of data analytics, 1,208 households affected by welfare reform changes, and generous worshipping Methodists on a Sunday at Parchmore last year. It was a Sunday on which we were celebrating news of a grant to the new *Community Connect/Food Stop* at Parchmore. The *Community Connect/Food Stop* will use data analytics held by the London Borough of Croydon, and membership of a club through which families can purchase food weekly at reduced cost, to prevent homelessness in low income families and provide employability support in partnership with the local council. The food is from the surplus at risk of going to waste and collected daily from supermarkets by FareShare

I wondered what George the engineer might have thought of the data analysis being undertaken by *Policy in Practice* (whereas George had been a Mechanical Engineer, I have studied Chemical Engineering). Then I recalled the words of the wisdom writers, making observations about oppressions and then about friendships, and describing the cord of three strands which is not easily broken. At Parchmore, George created a space and a method - a facility in both senses of the word - for weaving cords of many strands between people offering and needing friendships in our neighbourhood.

I come to Parchmore via the B.Th. programme of the University of South Africa and immersion in a seven point matrix of integrated theological praxis. In that language, in his approach to community development, George enabled praxis as contextual understanding in seeing a community theologically. George enabled praxis as reflexivity in being critical, creative and integrative. George enabled praxis as spirituality, affirming the depth and diversity of people's motivation in building their community.

That was also the Sunday on which we were returning to the words Jesus spoke after sending out the 72. The 72 return with joy and share their amazement at what can be accomplished when it is done with the vision and compassion of Jesus. Parchmore is replete with that meaning.

A few days before Christmas, a gift was brought by a person who was referred to Parchmore by the local medical centre. Over a period of months we had chatted about all sorts of things but not about faith because the person had never introduced it. The person hadn't want to bring food as a gift: ... *"there is generally too much food around at Christmas"* the person had said. And so this wooden pestle and mortar was offered because, in the words of the giver, *"it was the kind of thing Jesus might have made"*. There grew a sacramental moment: an outward sign of an invisible inward reality. It was the reality of a connection between people in which what was important to both people was being valued. Yes, a need had initiated that connection, but that person also brings thoughtfulness and interest and a desire to connect with the reasons others have for their being and their doing. Indeed, *"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."*

It was the Sunday on which we shared the news of George's death. On that Sunday, those words had an altered, poignant meaning.

In her book entitled *"The Preaching Life. Living out your vocation."* Barbara Brown Taylor writes *"There is even a chance that the Christian vocation is above all a vocation to imagine - to see what God sees when God looks at the world, and to believe that God's dreams can come true."* George evoked that shared vocation at Parchmore.

George's imagination is still at the heart of the *"Parchmore Way"*, and to George we would want to say, *"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."*