

Memoir: Malcolm Grundy, Director of Avec, 1991-4.

I saw the advertisement for a new Director of Avec while I was in my sixth year as Team Rector of Huntingdon in the diocese of Ely. We had just had a review of our work and it felt it right to look around so that my successor could appoint new staff.

I had been on an Avec course while I was Director of Training in the Diocese of London and had gained much from it, building on my previous experience of community development work.

Since the Trustees of Avec had appointed someone who was not in the close family of those who had worked with and been nurtured by George Lovell and Catherine Widdicombe it was clear that they wanted to move on in some new ways. In this I found great support from Nigel Gilson, the Avec Chair, and council members with significant national and international experience in the form of Gillian Stamp and Bishop Peter Selby. I decided on a process of gradual transition. George Lovell had already retired and I worked with Catherine Widdicombe for a further year until her retirement. One challenge I had not expected was that funds would still be used to support George's continuing research as his 'harvesting' of Avec's work since this was not fully financed by his Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship. This was a drain on finances but we took it on the chin. The 'order book' for courses was good and we could just about afford it.

I was able to put together a new team of part-time staff with Catherine Ryan and Mark Saunders being significant among them. Fred Graham and others helped in Northern Ireland. A great asset was the continuing presence of the Jesuit priest Henry Grant who was with us for six months of each year, spending the rest of his time in South America.

Our courses developed well, with good take-up from Church Urban Fund local project staff and ministers or staff from Methodist and URC community projects. Consultancy with Catholic religious orders brought in course members and funds alongside a major new series of pieces of work with the Anglican Franciscans – both the men's and women's Orders. We established partnerships with MODEM, the Edward King Institute for Ministry Development and the Adult Catechumenate Network, sharing a Journal called *Ministry* which I had founded and which I edited for 10 years. Early in 1995 I published *Community Work: a handbook for volunteer groups and local churches* drawing heavily on the philosophy of Batten and Lovell. The book was dedicated to George and Catherine and I had expected to use it as a resource book in later Avec courses.

By 1994, my third year as Director, Avec was in good shape. It had survived the transition from its founders and had both kept its previous 'market' and also added new clients and course members. I had completed the extension of our house in Bedfordshire, my wife had a good job nearby and we planned to stay on for many years. The main challenge which arose at that time was the proposal from the Chelsea and Victoria Methodist Circuit to move towards a 'market rent' for the use of two floors of conference and office rooms in its building which we occupied. It was clear that we would have to make cuts in our expenditure to meet this. I was helped enormously to make economies by Robin Bennett, a former national Adult Education

Adviser and now an Archdeacon in what he called 'stopping the leakages' of money. To have such expensive premises with a full-time secretary administrator meant that Avec would have to take on a different organisational shape for the future.

It was at this point sometime in 1994 and completely out of the blue I had a letter from a bishop I did not know asking me to consider becoming Archdeacon of Craven, a place I had not heard of. Discovering that Craven was the western part of the Yorkshire Dales and being aware that, although I had grown up in a village, my experience was entirely urban I declined the offer. Pressure then began to be applied. The Bishop of Bradford, David Smith and Archdeacon David Shreeve came down to London to try and persuade me. I still declined. Then Stephen Sykes, my bishop in the Diocese of Ely and a man who had given me great support and who I respected for his wisdom and learning, called me and asked me to reconsider. At this point I decided to accept and let others take over at Avec and lead it into what would have to be its restructured form. We had a good 'order book' with courses secure and well filled though the next year.

As I understand it the Avec Trustees decided on a cost-saving appointment of a half-time Director. Catherine Ryan with Mark Sanders took on the staffing of many courses in the interim and our treasurer kept a firm grasp of the finances. The Trustees, many of whom had come from a culture where grants and denominational subsidy had been the norm were rightly anxious about Avec being able to 'earn' enough from fees to continue. I had set out in that direction and thought it possible. I understand that a different form of Avec was decided on without premises and paid staff but with Associates continuing the work.

With the gift of hindsight, Avec was in a similar situation to other agencies competing for funding and course members at a time when trusts were experiencing lower income as interest rates fell and when denominations were doing more 'in-house' training. George Lovell has set out in *Avec – Agency and Approach* (Avec Publications 1996) a whole series of reasons why failure might have been inevitable including the fact that course fees only brought in 50% of necessary income. MARC Europe which Peter Brierley ran was the first big casualty. The Edward King Institute for Ministry Development also went. MODEM remains as it has little or no overheads and runs no courses. The Grubb Institute has faced many challenges and remains, charging relatively high fees. St George's House, Windsor undertook a major re-think at this time and I was asked as one of the principal advisors.

I am aware that Avec Associates continued the work but do not know in what ways. I took on the continuing work with the First and Third Order Franciscans, assisted by Catherine Ryan. I also contributed to the York St John University MA programme in Consultancy and Community Work which was pioneered by Helen Cameron and others.

All those of us who were trained by George and Catherine in the 'non-directive approach' have been influenced for life in our philosophy relating to consultancy and continue our commitment in many ways.

Malcolm Grundy,
June 2017.