

Work Consultancy Services for Missionaries, 1975 – 95
Provided by The Methodist Missionary Society (MMS), The Methodist Church
Overseas Division (MCOD) and Avec
George Lovell

Discussions between the Revs Dr Colin Morris and George Lovell in 1975 initiated twenty years cooperation in the provision of work consultancy services for missionaries and missionary organisations conducted by members of the staff of the newly formed organization, Avec under the aegis of MMS and MCOOD. By common consent this extensive programme became valued by both organisations and greatly enhanced their work. The first joint venture was a long series of courses for missionaries returning to work in the United Kingdom, the first of these was in 1976 and the last one in 1995. The second was a series of courses for missionaries on furlough; the first was in 1983 and the last in 1992. Other work evolved. In 1980 I led consultations in Zimbabwe on, 'Key Tasks in the Post War Period'. Between 1984 and 1986 I led three consultations on, 'Relationships in Mission' between MCOOD and the Methodist churches in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria. At various stages there were consultations with the staff of MCOOD about different aspects of their work. Following a brief note about Avec, this paper describes and reflects on this work and on the origins of the non-directive approach central to it under the section headings:

- How I came to be involved in this work
- Discussions with MMS Staff
- Reorientation Courses for Missionaries Returning to the UK
- Emergent Developments
- Furlough Courses
- The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe: Key Tasks in the Post War Period
- Relationships in Mission: An MCOOD/Avec Project, 1984 – 86
- Consultations with MCOOD Staff
- A Secular Missionary's Contribution to Christian Mission
- Conclusion

How I came to be involved in this work

First, a word about how I came to be involved in the provision of work consultancy services for missionaries and the nature of my involvement

During the 1960's and 70's I was deeply involved in practising the non-directive approach to human and spiritual development in churches and communities and studying and researching its praxis as I did so. Essentially, this approach is about getting and helping people, individuals and groups, to think profoundly for themselves, to own their conclusions and to work out the implications through creative action.

This extensive programme of action research proved beyond doubt that the approach is relevant to face-to-face, day-to-day church and community work, its analysis, design and evaluation. Using this approach to help ministers and lay workers with *their* vocational work led to the formulation of a mode and method of non-directive work consultancy which helped them to become more proficient reflective practitioners. Broadly speaking, work consultancy is to practitioners and their vocational lives and work what counselling is to people and their lives.

In 1975, convinced of the value of this work, Methodist and Roman Catholic Church leaders decided to form an ecumenical agency, Avec, to provide in-service training and consultancy services for clergy and laity.¹

Discussions with MMS Staff

Avec's chairman, the Rev Edward Rogers suggested that I approach the Rev Dr Colin Morris to explore the possibility of cooperating with MMS in the provision of services to missionaries. When I met him (and Rachel Stevens) in February 1975 he talked about difficulties he had faced in coming back to Britain after thirteen years in Zambia. For him Britain was an alien culture and he said that many missionaries had similar experiences. He said there was a deeply felt unmet need and MMS had the money to fund courses aimed at meeting such needs and a College where courses could be held during summer vacations. Discussion turned to the kind of courses/services Avec could provide. A combination of two things uniquely qualified Avec to provide reorientation and briefing courses for returning missionaries: the evaluated experience of a wide range of church and community work in the UK and the commitment to working *with* rather than *for* people. The former would provide useful information; the latter with its emphasis upon the non-directive approach would mean that the missionaries would be helped to think for themselves about their experiences as missionaries, the transitions through which they were passing, and their future life and work or retirement in the UK. Dr Morris asked me to prepare a detailed proposal for such courses.

Incredibly, this meeting was pivotal to twenty years extensive multi-various work with missionaries, the organizations that deployed them, and the churches they served.

Reorientation Courses for Missionaries Returning to the UK

I drafted a course outline, discussed it with my colleagues and tested it out with Father Patrick Fitzgerald, a White Father who had been a colleague team member in the ecumenical action research project to which I referred earlier. He had extensive experience in Zambia and, as the Rector of a seminary, in the preparation and training of priests to work in various parts of Africa. The proposal I submitted to Colin Morris was for residential courses for 6 to 12 missionaries *and* their spouses and children in two parts: *the first* as soon after their return to this country as possible and before they were redeployed in the UK; the second 9 to 12 months later. *The first part* would provide opportunities for them to reflect on and evaluate their experiences as missionaries and establish what they had learnt; to consider the current range of local church work in the UK and to reflect on it theologically with reference to their missionary experience; to consider church and community development praxis; to articulate and prepare a position paper about their approach to their work in Britain and what they would like to achieve; and to consider the support and training that they might need. They would be asked to evaluate the course for MMS.

The second part would provide opportunities for the ex-missionaries *and* their spouses *and* children to assess their experiences of living, ministering and working in the United Kingdom.

In advance, by way of preparation for the second course, both the ex-missionaries *and* their spouses would be asked to submit to a given outline papers describing critical aspects of their life and work during the preceding year. During the course they would be given opportunities in small co-consultancy groups to study each of these papers in turn and to think about the next phase of their work and ministry. Children and young people would also be given purposeful sessions on their experiences of returning to and living and studying in the UK. This emphasis upon the reorientation of the family was most creative and greatly appreciated.

The involvement of missionaries and their spouses in work analysis proved to be extremely important. Many of the spouses – at that time almost entirely wives – found it very exciting and fulfilling and said that it was the first time that the church had arranged for them to be involved in serious discussions and theological reflection about their separate and joint vocational work and their working relationships which at times were complex and even problematic. Indeed, it was more often than not, the first time that they had done anything like that together.

This basic structure of these courses was refined and developed through reflected experience and adapted to meet various circumstances, but the original elements remained unchanged.

During the period 1976 – 95 and Avec staff conducted 31 courses of this kind in which some 223 missionaries participated; most of them were presbyters involved in local church work, with a minority involved in regional and national work. There were also a significant number of deacons and lay participants. Records of these courses are catalogued and stored in the Avec Archives, Westminster College, Oxford up². Several people on these courses attended other Avec courses and events including a two-year postgraduate diploma. And some people used other Avec courses to prepare for overseas service. For instance The Rev Leslie Griffiths, as he was then, attended an Avec ten-day course in 1977 to prepare for a second tour in Haiti.³

Emergent Developments

Reorientation courses led directly to many other developments. At the end of the 70's and in the early 80's MCOB and Avec invited personnel and training officers of other missionary societies to attend seminars on the reorientation of missionaries. As a result close working relationships were established especially with CMS, USPG and several Roman Catholic religious orders dedicated to missionary work.

Meanwhile contact between Avec and MCOB developed in other directions: officers of MCOB including staff of Kingsmead College, Birmingham, the Principal, Peter Russell and the tutors, and several missionaries had attended Avec work study courses and, in some cases, follow-up courses to practise the skills of enabling work study and other groups. Returning missionaries looking at their work during the reorientation courses began to say, 'If only we could have done this when we were working overseas.'

Out of all this interaction came the suggestion for furlough courses as a co-operative effort between MCOB, Kingsmead and Avec. The proposal was that these courses should be staffed by Avec and Kingsmead, the former providing expertise in church and community development work and consultancy and the latter experience of cross-cultural mission and mission training. As the Principal of Kingsmead, Peter

Russell, who had attended two Avec courses was the obvious choice of worker from the Kingsmead side. A further advantage of this staffing was anticipated: those from Avec who had been involved in the reorientation programme had learnt a great deal about the conditions, needs and feelings of serving missionaries, and had seen the value of this being fed into initial training processes. In the event this feedback loop proved most useful; through working with missionaries in this way a lot was learnt about their feelings, initial problems, personal reactions and mistakes which greater understanding could have prevented or at least made less serious. There was also much to be learnt about the places in which missionaries were working and to which other missionaries would in future go. Much of this information was personal and confidential and so could not be shared, but the insights gained could be used without breaking confidences. There was also factual information about places and the nature of the work that was not usually so sensitive but which proved useful.

Furlough Courses

Missionary furlough courses were established. From the outset it was seen to be essential that attendance was voluntary. There were ten such courses, the first in 1983 and the last in 1992 with a total of 65 participants. Details of all ten courses are to be found in the Avec Archives but they are not readily available to me as I write; those for the first five are: there were thirty-five participants on these courses from five denominations who were working in fifteen different countries.⁴

Peter Russell and I staffed all ten courses. The evaluation of the courses by the participants was without exception positive; the participants recommended that the courses should be available to all missionaries on a permanent basis. Peter and I found them exciting and deeply fulfilling. After the first five courses we wrote an occasional paper describing the courses in some considerable detail reviewing and reflecting upon them; what follows draws heavily upon this document.⁵

The aims were:

1. to help the missionaries to work more effectively and with more satisfaction on their next tour;
2. to help them to use their furlough work to the best advantage of all concerned;
3. to provide them with opportunities to examine their feelings about Britain and the home church and the implications of those feelings.

Generally speaking these aims were achieved through structured exercises and discussions in sub-groups and plenary sessions. We saw the need for pursuing the second and third aims from our experience of returning missionaries having strong negative feelings about Britain and the home church. What we were doing took on added significance when we heard about the approach to reorientation problems adapted by a German missionary society which involved providing missionaries on a regular basis with information about cultural changes at home throughout their service overseas and debriefing and reorientation sessions furlough by furlough.

I turn now to the first aim and the principles of the approach and method fundamental to the way we went about achieving it.

Each person's situation was considered separately and individually in small co-consultancy groups according to their own abilities, beliefs and concerns (very much as we did in the reorientation courses). This work study method was used widely throughout Avec's work.⁶ Anecdotes were not allowed nor were comparisons with the work of other members of the group. To make useful contributions to another person and their work it was essential to give sympathetic attention to the *actualities* of the missionary and his/her situation without diverting attention by making premature comparisons with and references to other situations. Suggestions and insights were shared sensitively with the mutual understanding that action which was alien to anyone would not be imposed because that could not be done without detriment to their happiness, efficiency and satisfaction.

The work study followed a natural and systematic order with six stages: the participant's experience; consideration of his/her description of their work situation; analysis and discernment of the essentials; designing programmes and formulating plans; determining first steps to be taken after return; deciding on actions to be taken at once. One or two private consultations and 1¼ hour group sessions were dedicated to working through this sequence. Whenever possible, to give this process a kick-start, participants wrote a 'work paper' to a prescribed outline in advance and these were circulated. When they could not do this they made verbal presentations. During the session or sessions a member of the group took notes, edited them and handed them to the person concerned. The aim was to do just enough work to enable missionaries to pursue things on their own afterwards. Careful thought and discussion went into ascertaining whether or not this point had been reached or not. Posing various questions helped us to do this: Do you want to continue what we have been engaged in? Do you feel able and confident to do so on your own? Do you feel that you have made any of the ideas we have discussed your own and feel able to work them out with your colleagues? Do you feel free to do what *you* see to be appropriate if, on reflection, it is different from what is emerging from our discussions? Ascertaining that they did feel in charge of their own work and reinforcing their freedom and confidence to act autonomously was very important to us because it was utterly essential to their ability to do their work on their own in their situations overseas with satisfaction and to good effect – and that is one of the aims of work consultancy.

Paradoxically, participants found that they were most likely to discover insights which illuminate their own vocational work when they were concentrating totally on that of others and sympathetically entering into them, rather than looking for immediate comparisons with their own. Important consideration about how to approach or initiate changes in their own situation that had not become explicit in their own sessions, occasionally came unbidden in considering those of others.

Structured, serious and disciplined as these sessions were, they were anything but cold cerebral analytical processes. Because we were talking about the work of God, they were spiritual exercises which frequently became profound spiritual experiences. Quite often we became conscious that we were standing on holy vocational ground. In fact, we were engaged in collaborative exercises in the application of faith and theology; consequently analysis and design, theology, spirituality and fellowship (*koinonia*) were interwoven strands throughout the whole process.

Initiating the courses was not without difficulty. Not all missionaries, for instance, were on furlough at the same time. Some of the people who were not able to make these courses attended other Avec courses; co-consultancy sessions were arranged for individual and small ad hoc groups. On more than one occasion it was suggested that staff members should travel overseas and lead courses in the actual context of the missionaries work but this was never implemented.⁷

Each course ended with the analysis and discussion of appraisal forms filled in by participants. Without exception these were positive and one missionary said of his work paper session, 'It was wonderful to be able to discuss my work for two hours with like-minded people'. Others have talked about being able to see ways forward, of having new ideas, of identifying problem areas and finding ways of solving them and of realising the importance of the next tour overseas. The following long quotation from an extended interview with Rosalind (Ros) Colwill about her many experiences of Avec courses is included because of insights into the processes and their value.

An experience on one of the first Furlough Courses has remained with me over the years. One of the ordained missionaries, John ... felt that it was time to leave what he had been doing and to move onto something else. He was struggling to decide which of four very interesting options... the will of God for him was. We went into the issues in great depth. The quality of the sharing was moving and humbling. ... we helped him most by exploring the criteria by which he decided God's will for and by challenging the assumption that he was most likely to find God's will in what he saw to be the worst and the hardest option. ... [we] got onto this because, although John was trying to treat all the options equally, we saw that the one nearest to his heart he put right at the bottom of the list. He lit up when that was mentioned. He was afraid of that option because he wanted it so much that he felt that it couldn't be God's will, it must be his own selfish ambition. The group helped him to see that the last option on the list might be God's will for him. It was not disqualified because he was attracted to it, what excites you and makes you feel happy is quite likely to be the thing God wants you to do, and the place where all your talents and strengths... can best be used. I am convinced that Avec's rule about no anecdotes helped us in that session. It prevented us from being side-tracked by comparing John's dilemma with our experiences... That would not have helped. Working with John and his experience and his issues did help. That doesn't mean that you shut out your own experience. You take from it anything which you feel might be relevant to the other person and offer it for him/her to take up or discard. But you do not get them to switch to your experience or story.⁸

Missionaries as well as staff learnt about many different missionary postings and work and gaining a much more detailed and realistic picture of the world Church and its work among other peoples and cultures. Connections made between missionaries on the courses led in some cases to them corresponding with each other and continuing the discussions started on courses. Some missionaries attended further courses on subsequent furloughs.⁹ Clearly, there were many tangible benefits from these courses, not only for the missionaries themselves but also for the church and colleagues overseas, for the home church and the sending agencies and the family.

The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe: Key Tasks in the Post War Period

Following the Lancaster House Agreement (December 1979), there was a movement to majority rule and on 18 April 1980 the United Kingdom ceremonially 'granted' independence to the newly formed Zimbabwe. At the invitation of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and under the aegis of MCOB, in August of that year I was privileged to lead consultations on the rehabilitation of the work after the war. A Connexional working party of some fourteen church leaders, predominantly black, met in Gwelo for seven days under the chairmanship of the Rev Dr Crispin C.G. Mazobere to which I acted as a non-directive work consultant. The purpose was:

To make a contribution towards determining just what it is necessary to do during the post-war period to re-establish the work of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe so that it can make the best possible contribution to its own members and to the community of which it is a part.

In order to picture and contextualize the situation, we differentiated between four periods in the life of the Methodist Church, first in Rhodesia and then in Zimbabwe: pre-war; war-time; post-war; the future. Then we considered the relative strengths and weaknesses of the church in the first three of these periods and the critical factors in the current working situation. Reflecting on the emergent material we considered what kind of a church the participants wished to see in the newly formed Zimbabwe and the key tasks in building up such a church and its work. I drafted records of the discussions stage by stage and a thirty-nine page report of the consultation after the first five days work. The working party studied, checked and revised the records as they were produced and then the report thoroughly on the seventh day! It included eight requests for action to the Standing Committee and through them to their Conference. Importantly, therefore, it was in reality the Report¹⁰ of the Working Party produced there and then in order that the ideas could be communicated and discussed throughout the church and thought could be translated into action as soon as possible.

During the remainder of the month that I was in Zimbabwe I led consultations with church officers and committees on the Report. I am not in a position to assess the impact of the Report on the life and work of the Church, but I was pleased to discover that it was sufficiently alive a decade later to be reproduced as an appendix to *A Century of Methodism in Zimbabwe, 1891 – 1991*.¹¹

I found it particularly gratifying that the members of the consultation considered that the way in which it was structured and led was 'a model for promoting thoughtful action' and began to speculate about the possibility of similar procedures being used for the same kind of purpose in, say, the conference, the districts and synods and the circuit meetings. That led to a discussion about their ability to adopt the approach and use the methods and whether, in any case, it was advisable to get people thinking for themselves. Considering these things, the kind of open, non-loaded questions that facilitated discussion and the functions of non-directive workers led them to realize that they had more resources than they thought and that they had been learning about these ways of working through their experience of the consultation and that further more that they could continue to learn about them through trying them out and through periodic training sessions.

Discussing the pros and cons of getting people to think and decide and act for themselves, they came to the conclusion that whilst it takes time and people 'can get bogged down', the advantages outweigh the disadvantages: it engenders commitment, responsibility and confidence, which leads people to stick at things with tenacity and endurance; it is satisfying and fulfilling and promotes human understanding and growth. 'Such qualities', they concluded 'are required of Christians in Zimbabwe' and therefore, they said, they wanted a 'thinking church.'¹² Many years later I met a training and development officer of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe who told me about the ways in which she and others were using this approach, methods and procedures.

An incident in the very first session of the consultation was a key to the acceptance of my non-directive approach and vindicated its use. Spontaneously, an intensive group conversation erupted in which they shared deep feelings and high hopes that they had about the situation in which they found themselves. I listened intently for the best part of an hour without intervening. When the conversation had run its course, I structured and summarized what they had been saying. This was followed by an awesome silence which lasted possibly only for a minute or two but which seemed to last for an eternity, and which I was at a loss to interpret. Had I offended them and got off on the wrong foot? Had I misunderstood and misrepresented them? What should I do now? One person broke the silence and said, 'You have a good ear. You have heard and understood what we were saying. No white man has listened to us like that.' There was a murmur of approval. I was deeply moved then as I am now as I recall the incident. To my great relief, I knew we were going to be able to work together.

Relationships in Mission: An MCODE/Avec Project, 1984 – 86

During the early 80's MCODE staff was concerned to move the relationship with overseas churches to one where dependency and independence gave way to interdependence and mutuality. The idea of consultations with West African churches under the title of 'Relationships in Mission' emerged. The late Rev Sidney Groves was deeply involved in organizing this project. I was asked to design and lead them. Consultations designed to enhance interdependence and mutuality were held between MCODE and the Methodist Churches in Sierra Leone (1984), Ghana (1985), and Nigeria (1986). The objectives were:

1. To learn together from each other how to be increasingly helpful to each other in the work to be done in each place, and how that work might be enriched in partnership and fellowship through:
 - (a) sharing understanding, exploring common problems, concerns and resources;
 - (b) establishing guidelines for determining priorities for mission and the use of resources.
2. To determine what is being learned about relationships in mission and to make suggestions to the churches and organisations represented.
3. To share ideas about a possible multilateral consultation.

Progress was made in relation to these objectives but circumstances unforeseen at the outset, prevented holding a multilateral consultation.

The facilitating group consisted of three ongoing staff members (the late Ivy McGhie, MCOA Africa Secretary, George Lovell and Leslie Griffiths) who benefitted from the addition of a local person in Ghana and Nigeria. Leslie's job was to record the consultations and to write them up. Doing that involved something which now seems incongruous – he had not to participate verbally in the sessions! It is a measure of his discipline that he only spoke on one or two occasions. Each consultation involved structured discussions between two teams: one representing the particular church in West Africa and the other representing MCOA and the Church in Britain. Each team presented profiles of the work and contextual factors affecting their church. When one team was satisfied that the other team understood the picture and points emerging from their profile, and not until then, they established an agreed programme of work to be done in the time that remained. Ways and means of working at the agreed tasks in subgroups and plenary sessions were drawn up. As each piece of work was completed, recommendations were formulated and drafts prepared for inclusion in a final report. Each draft was carefully considered and agreed by participants. Then, in each of the consultations, a definitive report of the proceedings and recommendations was compiled, edited by the working party and copies produced for each participant to take away with them. This allowed everyone to own the report. (This was achieved through the assiduous work undertaken by staff and by typists and secretaries provided by the host church.)

These reports were an important achievement and certainly of more value than a more refined report sent after the event to the participants might have been. First assessment of the experience by the participants before the close of each consultation allowed the facilitating group to make modifications to the Ghana and Nigeria consultations. It is not possible here to give an account of the findings of these consultations which are summarised in an article in the *Expository Times*¹³.

The general consensus was that the methods used for these consultations worked well. Each of the consultations developed its own dynamic; friendships were formed, participants were honest – sometimes brutally so – in their search for the truth and ways of proceeding together. In each of the consultations two different groups of people, the one from the host church and the other from MCOA, helped each other to cross frontiers of experience to see things from the other's perspective and to develop agendas on the basis of what they had perceived. There were moments when the spirit of God moved the hearts and minds of people who had not been understanding each other so that love and grace flooded in and brought reconciliation and peace. There was general agreement that the method could well be employed more widely.

In the 90's at the suggestion of my Research Support Group I conducted a series of extended interviews designed to give people who had been influenced by Avec the opportunity to tell their stories and to explain the impact that it had had on them and their work. Three of the people I interviewed had participated in these consultations. Here I quote some of the things they said.

The President of the conference of the Sierra Leone Methodist Church at the time, The Rev Nelson Charles, reflections, May 1994 said:

The consultation was an eye opener. ... None of us had ever experienced anything like that before. It was very different from a conference where a few people gave lectures...some of our friends who came from provincial churches were not as outspoken as others...They were bemused at first but as the consultation developed...they got to follow up the discussion they knew that the aim was beneficial to the local church and became more interested and participated more. All of us gained a lot of confidence. The diagrams you drew helped everyone to participate...they dramatized situations...We weren't just using words....We could see things as objects...It helped us to listen to see things to ask questions and to understand. It was all so very different and better than anything we had known before.

Ten years later I would say that the consultation helped the work of the church in my time. ¹⁴

The Rev Dowridge-Williams who succeeded Nelson Charles as President of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone reflections, May 1994 said:

'Giving and receiving' became a central theme of the consultation. ... The consultation opened our eyes. We have an African proverb which says 'a hand goes, a hand comes'. That is to say you will give and take. That is how life should be lived...these ideas were suppressed by the way in which the Methodist Church Overseas Division gave financial grants to us. This is where we put a very big blame on the early missionaries. They gave people the impression that they will always receive and not that they are to give. So people have grown over the years with that ideology which was not African. The consultation started to reverse all that.

Another thing we have done is to use the methods used at that consultation to promote church growth and development. ¹⁵

Miss Rosalind Colwill, a mission partner who was a participant in the Nigerian consultation, 1995 said:

Whenever we talk of church history in Nigeria that consultation is always talked of as the occasion which turned round the relationship between Methodist Church Nigeria and the Overseas Division.

Following on from that consultation the two sides of the Methodist Church in Nigeria, the 'Presidential' and the 'Patriarchal', set up a committee to seek reconciliation....They decided to have a consultation organized in a similar way to the Avec one. At their respective Conferences they appointed equal numbers of Elders to meet and pursue the consultative process. It worked. We are now reconciled in one church. ¹⁶

Consultations With MCOB Staff

At various times during this period I was invited to lead work consultation sessions with individual staff members on their work and with the staff as a whole on the work of the Department. Details of these are not available to me as I write.

A Secular Missionary's Contribution to Christian Mission

All the work described in this paper was facilitated through various applications of the non-directive approach, a concept we owe to Dr T R Batten. From 1927 to 1949 he worked in Africa, first in the Colonial Education Service in Nigeria and then as Vice Principal of Makerere College, Uganda in setting up a social studies department.

In Nigeria he worked assiduously for an indigenous educational system consonant with African perspectives on life and history. Very early in his career Batten identified the cardinal mistake of educating Africans from the perspective of European history. Realising that well composed historical perspectives and world-views has positive effects on the education and development of people and upon their personal and corporate sense of identity, he undertook the enormous task of recasting world history *from the perspective* of Africans living in tropical Africa. For three or four years he tested out how to do this at Government College, Ibadan. Then he wrote a series of four textbooks for a four-year course of study for middle and junior secondary schools, *Tropical Africa in World History*.

In Makerere he worked equally assiduously to establish the cultural, developmental, economic and educational, financial conditions necessary to constructive qualitative self-government. He came to the conclusion that a primary requirement in every aspect of this wide spectrum of developmental work was to equip people to think, decide and act for themselves in relation to their own best interests and those of their communities i.e. to promote the common good through active informed participation. It was when he came to consider *how* to achieve his aims in both these spheres of work that he broke entirely new ground by coming up with an original concept which he called *non-directive*. The practise of this approach was central to all the work discussed above. Thus, Batten, a secular missionary for indigenous education and comprehensive human development, made unique and profound contributions to the work of Christian mission – and to that of many other secular and religious organizations.¹⁷

Conclusion

MCOD does not field as many mission partners as it did in the period 1976 – 96; Avec services are no longer available. So, why have I written this paper in the 85th year of my life and the 55th of my ministry? For several reasons:

- to contribute to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Bicentenary Celebrations Conference;
- to overview a rich seam of work;
- to demonstrate the value and the continuing universal validity of non-directive work consultancy processes for mission and ministry;
- to stimulate interest in and encourage the provision of these invaluable services by churches in this and other countries; (Currently I am engage in consultations with a returned mission partner who could benefit greatly from a reorientation course.)
- to make more widely known that a significant number of people have been and continue to be trained in work consultancy through a two-year, part-time , MA/diploma in-service training course in Consultancy for Ministry and Mission¹⁸;

- to make more widely known the extensive documents of the work done by MCODE and Avec which are now in their respective archives, and which could provide valuable information to those researching missionary activities in the period;
- to salute MCODE and its staff during that period – an outstanding avant-garde organisation and group of people promoting and facilitating comprehensive, seamlessly integrated ministry and mission in fields of local and pastoral ministry, education, medical work and community and social development throughout the world.

And, to express my deep heartfelt gratitude to God and to the Church for the great privilege of participating, howbeit in a minor role, in such a rich seam of broad based mission work with extraordinary Christian missionaries, missionary organizations and churches in different parts of the world.

14th of September 2013

Notes

* Indicates the text of the book is accessible on line at, www.avecresources.org

1. For more than ten years in the 1960's and 70's I was involved with others in practising the non-directive approach to community development in Christian churches and critically examining the validity of its praxis which emphasized the importance of working *with* in contradistinction to working *for* people. I did this through two action-research projects: the first of these was in a Methodist Church and was written up for a doctoral thesis; the second, known as Project 70-75, was with a local Council of churches in North London which comprised sixteen churches of seven denominations and resulted in a published report. Lovell, George and Widdicombe, Catherine, *Churches and Communities: An approach to development in the local church** (Search Press) 1978. This work proved beyond doubt that the approach is of great importance to churches and convinced leaders in the Methodist and Roman Catholic churches of the necessity to provide training and consultancy services ecumenically. Consequently, in 1975 I became involved with an inter-church group in wide ranging discussions which led to the formation of an ecumenical agency, Avec, to promote the praxis of this approach in Christian ministry and mission and to provide in-service training and consultancy services for clergy and laity. For an account of the life and work of this agency see: Lovell, George, *Avec: Agency & Approach** (An Avec Publication 1996).

2. Details are presented in the *Avec Archives Annotated Catalogue** pp 32-33 and *Avec Agency and Approach** pp 142-43

3. Leslie Griffiths describes in some detail the far reaching positive effects the course had upon him and his subsequent work in Haiti in Lovell, George (editor) *Telling Experiences: Stories about a Transforming Way of Working with People** (Chester House Publications), 1996, pp 16-28. This book reports a research project into the stories of some of the people who attended Avec courses or used its consultancy services. The project was made possible through a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship.

4. The paper to which I refer and upon which I am drawing is: Russell, Peter V and Lovell, George, *Furlough Work Study* March 1988, 31pp.

On the first five courses there were: 24 Methodists; 1 Anglican; 1 Quaker; 6 Roman Catholics; 1 Wesley Reform Union. Of these 15 were females and 6 males; 4 were Religious; 1 a deaconess; 7

ordained. They served in 15 different countries: Brazil (1); China (1); the Gambia (2); Guyana (1); Hong Kong (2); India (5); Ivory Coast (1); Kenya (2); Nepal (5); Nigeria (3); Sierra Leone (4); Sri Lanka (2); Uganda (1); Zambia (1); Zimbabwe (2).

5. *Furlough Work Study*

6. Work consultancy processes, sessions and courses are fully described in two of my books: *Analysis and Design: a Handbook for Practitioners** and *Consultants In Church And Community Work** (Burns and Oates), 1994 and in *Consultancy Ministry And Mission: A Handbook For Practitioners and Work Consultants In Christian Organisations** (Burns and Oates) 2000, pp 357 – 60, Appendices I and III. See also a third book I wrote in this series, *Consultancy Modes and Models** (Cliff College Academic Series, Cliff College Publishing, 2005).

See also: Copley, David and New, Charles 'Take Three Presbyters...The Role of Co-consultancy', *Epworth Review*, Volume 27/ number three, 2000

7. For a discussion on consultants working on a consultants' situation with them without personal acquaintance with their situation through having lived or worked in it or visited it see *Consultancy Ministry and Mission** pp 28, 35, 54 – 55, 192 – 6.

8. *Telling Experiences** pp186-187

9. Notable among these was Ros Colwill who attended four and has had a series of consultations with me over the years. In the interview already quoted she said, 'I have never had any other opportunities of the kind provided by those courses to look in depth with other missionaries at their work and mine. ... Other courses organized by the Methodist church do not do anything approaching what we did on the furlough courses.' *Telling Experiences** pp 178 – 79.

10. *The Methodist Church In Zimbabwe, Key Tasks In The Post War Period: A Connexional Working Party's Report Of A Consultation At Gwelo And The Standing Committee's Response To It*, August 1980, Compiled And Edited By The Rev Dr George Lovell

11. The general editor was, Canaan Sodindo Banana and it was published by the Methodist church in Zimbabwe in 1991.

12. A whole page in the Report was devoted to this very important overall conclusion and that the discussions leading up to it, p 25.

13. Griffiths, Leslie T, 'Relationships In Mission', *Epworth Review*, vol 15, no 2, May 1988

14. *Telling Experiences* pp 116 and 118

15. *Telling Experiences* pp 119

16. *Telling Experiences* p 189

17. See 't.r.batten and madge batten, non-directivity and community development', <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/batten.htm> , in which I describe the work and lives of the Battens and explore in some detail the origins of the non-directive concept in Thomas Reginald Batten's comparatively unknown groundbreaking work on education and development in Africa 1927 – 1949 and list his publications.

18. These courses are currently provided at York Institute For Community Theology. See <http://www.yict.org.uk/>