

Telling Experiences

**Stories About A Transforming
Way of Working With People**

**Edited by
GEORGE LOVELL**

**With a Foreword by the Rt. Revd. David Sheppard,
Bishop of Liverpool**

© George Lovell 1996

First Published October 1996

© George Lovell 1996

ISBN 0 7150 0097 7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers, Chester House Publications.

*To Catherine Widdicombe
and the
Grail Community
and the
Silver Jubilee
of our
Working Partnerships*

Design and illustration by Twenty-Five Educational, London NW1 5JR
Printed by Clifford Frost Ltd., Wimbledon SW19 2SE

CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
A Prefatorial Note	viii
Preface and Acknowledgements	ix
I Background to the Stories	1
II Collaborative Ministry	
1 The Minister as Technocrat: Leslie Griffiths	15
2 A Way of Life: Charles New	29
3 A Non-Directive Approach to Evangelical Ministry: Howard Mellor	42
4 Direct and Non-Directive Action: Fred Graham	57
III Working <i>With</i> People in Parishes in Areas of Deprivation	
1 Masks Off: Joanna Brennan	69
2 Empowered to Empower: Richard McKay	76
3 Freedom to Participate: David Herrick	84
4 Leaders Who Block Change: Christine Sales	94
IV Changes in Organizations	
1 The Catholic Deaf Association: Charles Hollywood	103
2 The Methodist Church, Sierra Leone: Nelson Charles & Dowridge Williams	113
3 A Travellers' Parish: Sean Farrell	121
4 The Conference of Religious: Gabriel Robin	131
5 Religious Orders: Maureen Connor	137
V Consultations About Vocation and Work	
1 Facing Big Changes Together: Rosemary & Howard Mellor	150
2 United in Vocation, Marriage and Approach: Diane & Richard Clutterbuck	157
3 A New Work Culture: Brian Woodcock	162
4 Furlough Courses and Consultations: Rosalind Colwill	177
VI Reflecting and Responding	
Charted Summaries of the Stories, the Changes that Occurred, the Issues Considered and the Subjects Discussed	193
Appendix: Current <i>Avec</i> type resources	226

FOREWORD

There are, as the editor acknowledges, other books which would claim to communicate just what the "Avec approach" is all about. This book, I believe, offers something very different. We have here, in story form, the experiences of eighteen modern day followers of Christ, ordained and lay, male and female, which together offer a powerful testimony to the effectiveness of the method. I am particularly encouraged to see that the stories demonstrate use by different Churches, thus offering powerful ecumenical possibilities. It is also clear from all the stories that the process of analysis and design, which in turn enables the creation of an appropriate, creative and affirming approach to many different Church and community situations is of lasting importance to all concerned, not least those engaged in "the front line" of the mission of the Church in today's world.

Whilst it is true that "Avec" offers a particular approach, and indeed there are other ways, nevertheless I believe that the stories offered here confirm that the "Avec experience" offers a way forward that has stood the test of time and deserves to be taken seriously. I warmly commend this book to all who are concerned with how we effectively respond to the many different God given opportunities which life in the community presents.

September 1996

David Sheppard, Bishop of Liverpool

A PREFATORIAL NOTE

People may be surprised at this kind of a book from George Lovell's pen. For this the members of his advisory group must take responsibility, because it was we who encouraged George to adopt this approach. It seemed important to us that people who have been influenced by Avec should be given the opportunity to tell their stories and to explain the impact that it had had on them and the way they tackled their work. This is why George is described as the editor not the author. The aim was to choose people whose experience of Avec was positive. Of course there were some people for whom this was not the case but the MARC Europe survey of Avec in 1990 showed that the vast majority of people who had used Avec's services had found it a positive and helpful experience. We are glad to take responsibility for encouraging George to adopt this approach because we believe the results speak for themselves.

Michael Bayley (Chair)
David Deeks
Leslie Griffiths

Peter Russell
Moirra Sleight
Catherine Widdicombe

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I retired in 1991 as the director of an ecumenical service agency for church and community work, Avec, the Trustees appointed me as a research worker for a period of three years. Following a recommendation made by an independent survey of Avec's work by MARC Europe, they commissioned me to make contributions towards "harvesting the work of Avec and to making its intellectual assets more readily accessible". I have been fully engaged in that task ever since. This is the third book that results from that commission (the others are *Analysis and Design*, 1995; *Avec: Agency and Approach*, 1996.) There is a sense in which it should have been the first because it makes the other literature more accessible. It tells stories about the quite remarkable changes which occurred in clergy, religious and laity and churches and organizations through courses and consultancy services provided by Avec and through practising what they learnt in different situations.

Researching the effects of the work of Avec through collecting a clutch of stories was the idea of a group who, from 1992 to 1996, acted as a research support group to me. Their prefatorial note makes that clear. Initially I resisted the idea. I wanted to get on with researching the methodology and writing hand and text books! Without that group this book would not have been written. Members of the group saw it as "our" project, theirs and mine. They worked through it stage by stage, discussing transcripts of interviews and drafts of the sections. They kept me to our stated purpose of allowing the stories to speak for themselves by dissuading me from including material I wrote examining the implications of what was emerging. (That material was, in fact, used to better effect in *Avec: Agency and Approach*, 1996.) The group helped and disciplined me to organize and carry out a more effective programme of research than I would otherwise have done. (Some of my first "research notes" were off beam!) Moira Sleight helped me to acquire some skills in "sub-editing" and, taking a cue from two books by Mary Loudon, to convert the question-answer mode of the interview transcripts to that of a story narrative. But more, the group acted as a pastoral group helping me through the trying transition from director to research worker.

For all this I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness to them and especially to Michael Bayley who acted as chair to the group and who was also a colleague and research consultant to me between group meetings. They all gave of themselves generously and freely even though they were extraordinarily busy people. Thank you for helping me to harvest twenty years of training and consultancy work.

Catherine Widdicombe, my colleague for over twenty-five years, was a member of that group. She too was involved in harvesting the work in her own right and through interviewing two people. I indicate just how important her support and collegueship have been and thankfully still are by the dedication.

But there were others. A day with the Rev Professor Leslie Francis confirmed our belief in the idea of interviews and helped us to consider various ways of putting it

into practice. Then there was what I want to describe as the production team: Molly my wife; Mrs Valerie Tredinnick and Sister Margaret O'Connor. Molly transcribed most of the tape recordings on to disc. A tedious, difficult and time consuming task which she did superbly. Valerie transcribed some of the recordings and typed and re-typed the most messy edited version of the transcriptions. They worked hand in glove willingly and patiently over a period of two years. My gratitude is profound. Thank you. Margaret read the sections as we produced them, smoothed out the English, raised helpful questions and greatly encouraged me by her enthusiasm for the project.

Initially the work was financed by Avec. When it ran out of money in 1993 I took voluntary retirement in order to continue and complete the work. This was made possible through a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship which paid for the research and through the Victoria and Chelsea Circuit's generous contribution to my income for one year until I received my state pension. I am deeply thankful to both these bodies. They made this harvesting possible. And, as I have said elsewhere, the spiritual and moral support the Circuit has given to me for almost twenty years is one of the great gifts I have received from the Church. Throughout the time that I have been working on this book I have valued the collegueship of the Rev Jed Davis, my superintendent minister.

To Chester House Publications I am deeply grateful. This is the fourth of my books they have published and each one they have improved. To the Rev David Gamble I am greatly indebted. When the manuscript was completed he took it up for publishing with an infectious enthusiasm on behalf of Chester House, worked on it assiduously and quickly (goodness only knows where he found the time to do so) and made creative suggestions which have improved the text generally and the first chapter in particular. I value his partnership in this project. Deborah Spiers entered and extended that partnership and contributed creative ideas to the presentation and production of the book, as did Mark Howard of Twenty-Five Educational.

But my final word must be to thank the contributors from the bottom of my heart. They gave of themselves generously. Listening to them tell their stories was a moving journey of discovery. Continually I was amazed and humbled by how much had evolved from so little. Things emerged which I could not have guessed at. It was a time of revisiting, catching up with what happened and gaining new insights into what Avec had been about.

September 1996

George Lovell

Chapter One

BACKGROUND TO THE STORIES

I went to Avec to get some extra skills. I came away from Avec a more developed person and therefore more skilled.

A Roman Catholic Parish Priest

I have received a lot and grown a lot through my involvement with Avec... To stand back, not just from my working situation, but from myself and my life, in order to look, assess, set targets and to think laterally, has been of tremendous value. I am quite a different person because of my involvement with Avec.

A United Reformed Minister

The *avec* approach is a way of life that is indivisible between working in the church or the community as a member of a family or getting on with my mates down the road. I am committed to it because I am passionately convinced about the rightness of our calling as Christians to help to create the kind of human societies that reflect the values of the New Testament and particularly those of the Gospels.

A Methodist Minister

You don't need a university education to be empowered and that is what the *avec* approach does for all kinds of people.

What I got out of those furlough courses were things that are real to my situation because they are true to life... In relation to my work in Nigeria over the past fourteen and a half years, Avec courses... have been the single most helpful thing in the area of professional development that has happened to me.

A Roman Catholic Laywoman, a Mission Partner in the Methodist Church

This is what I want to say to churches: "Look, here is something that we see can work. It is not a high-tech, high profile method. But the method has affinities with the method which God uses. So it has to have something going for it."

A member of a Roman Catholic Religious Order of women

These quotations are culled from the eighteen short stories which form the core of this book. It is a collection of people's stories packed with adult case histories. It is not a scientific survey but it is research into the effects of a unique approach to working with people. Each story illustrates what the book is all about, a transforming way of working and living, of doing and being. All the people interviewed came to value and practise this way of working through attending courses run by an agency called Avec, or through using the consultancy services provided by the staff. From 1976 to 1994 Avec was an ecumenical service agency for church and community work based in the Kings Road, Chelsea. It is described briefly in the display at the end of this chapter along with a note about subsequent developments. As an aid to more readily understanding the stories, the third section of this chapter outlines some of the ideas upon which Avec based its work and the methods it used.

THE NEED FOR PRACTITIONERS' STORIES

A hardy annual at the end of courses and consultancy sessions was, "How do I explain to my colleagues and friends the experience that I have just had? It is so different from other discussions about my work." The most helpful answer was, "Tell your story and then, if they are interested, tease out with them what was important to you in the process and the approach." That is what this book allows a widely representative group to do in relation to what happened to them during their initial experience of the approach and afterwards for periods of up to twenty-three years.

All the stories are about journeys that the contributors made from traditional approaches to one which emphasizes the importance of working *with* as well as *for* people. (That is why the agency was called *Avec*, French for *with*. Not surprisingly the approach has become known as the *avec* approach.) A considerable amount of literature is now available about this approach. It describes the theory, theology and practice and the ways in which it has been tested and researched. It discusses the tricky problems of putting it into practice and the rewards of doing so. It examines in some depth how to help individuals and groups themselves to analyse and design their work. Generally speaking this material is about the "how" and the "why" of the approach. This book, through allowing contributors to tell their stories in their own words and to reflect on their experiences, meets a cluster of needs through bridging a gap in the literature.

One of the reasons why this book is necessary is that whilst I was collecting these stories the unexpected news broke that *Avec* was to cease to trade in August 1994. Leaving aside all the anguish and disappointment, I had several reactions in relation to writing this book. First, I felt deeply that it was important to tell the stories so that consideration could be given to ways of compensating for what was being lost. A second response was that collecting testimonies was a somewhat bizarre activity that exposed the improvidence of closing a resource of proven value. The questions that haunted me were, "What will be the effect upon those who want to have the kind of experience that these people had?" "Will the stories simply be cruelly tantalizing?" Developments have eased the pain of the questions but only slightly. For instance the *Avec* Association was inaugurated (see The Appendix: Current *Avec* Type Resources). Consequently direct experience, the preferred option for many, is still an option through courses and services provided by this Association. And, whilst *Avec*'s closure sadly reduced the courses available, the services it provided over a period of eighteen years multiplied the number of practitioners and consultants in the major denominations at work in different parts of the country and the world and thereby increased opportunities for direct experience of the approach through them. But the questions did not go away. The resources for providing what *Avec* offered are meagre and something of a scandal. The need for agency services remains.

Gradually, a little more light dawned through discovering that the stories we were collecting for this book were windows on telling experience charged with human interest and doors into understanding the practice, theory and theology of the approach. Someone, for instance, who had not experienced the approach read various books about it. Then she read the first two of these stories I produced. Immediately, she said, she gained an understanding of what the approach was all about in a depth

that had eluded her in her other reading. This showed that the stories provide a vicarious experience of the approach and enable people to examine the experiences and the approach and to come to their own judgements about them. At the same time they give many clues about how to practise them and about the nature of the underlying ideas and beliefs. They do not purport to be a systematic presentation of the methodology, theory and theology that has been done elsewhere, although the charted summaries in the final chapter go some way towards scanning major themes and issues. They point to what could be a useful exercise – to formulate from the stories a code of good practice and basic theory and theology. Rosemary Mellor did just that from her own experience (see Chapter V).

Eventually I saw that for those who do not have access to direct experience, this book provided an entry into what could be described as a "distance learning programme". Once people had got the feel of the approach and a desire to practise it, a range of handbooks, also grounded in experience, can help them to study and learn about it in relation to: practising the approach in local situations; working with groups, churches and communities; analysing and designing church and community work; acting as a work consultant; providing in-service and consultancy services. In fact, now that this material is available, serious consideration can be given to distance learning programmes. And, as can be seen from the Appendix, the books can be seen as a sequential study course for individuals or groups. In addition there is a considerable amount of research material and extensive archives. (Details of resources and publications are given in the Appendix.)

One of the joys of collecting and editing these stories was the excitement of seeing new things about an approach I had been practising, researching, teaching and writing about for thirty years. It was a manifold learning experience. Apart from what I was learning about the approach, it was a stimulating experience of the extraordinary range of work within which the Church is engaged. So, the book is for seasoned practitioners and for those who want a picture of the *avec* approach at work in the Church at large.

Throughout, my basic objective is to promote the understanding and practice of, and research into, the *avec* approach to working with people in religious and secular settings with especial reference to:

- churches and allied Christian organizations and those with whom they work in Church and society;
- practitioners at all levels;
- consultants;
- the analysis, design and evaluation of church and community work;
- training of practitioners, consultants and those engaged in appraisal schemes;
- the provision of *Avec* type services.

THE STORIES

All the contributors to this book came to value the *avec* approach through direct experience of it. They represent five denominations – the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches and the United Reformed

Church. Two are lay-people; one is a deaconess; four are Roman Catholic religious; one is an Anglican priest; and one is a Church of Ireland priest. Six are Methodist ministers, of whom one was President of the British Methodist Conference and one was the President of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone; two are Roman Catholic priests; one is a United Reformed minister. Theologically they varied enormously across the evangelical-radical spectrum. They were engaged in a wide range of work. Nine of them were working in local churches and parishes varying from urban and deprived to suburban and privileged. One person was working with travellers in Ireland, another with profoundly deaf people in Manchester and in a national organization. One person was the Overseas Service Secretary for the Methodist Church; another was the Secretary to the Conference of Religious, England, Scotland and Wales. Yet another person was the Principal of a college which serves a broad based evangelical church. Together they represented work in the UK, Republic of Ireland and West Africa and in several other parts of the world. Some people had only a few months' experience of the *avec* approach, several had upwards of twenty and one had twenty-three years. So the stories touch on many important aspects of the working lives of very different practitioners in a wide range of situations.

This collection of stories of experiences of the *avec* approach complements MARC Europe's extensive 1990 postal survey of about a thousand people who had attended Avec courses and used its consultancy services. Strengths and weaknesses of the courses and services were identified. The results were published in a 240 page report.¹

Overwhelmingly those surveyed put high value on the experience and found what they had learnt useful, although they were not uncritical. The result was a very helpful profile of the work of Avec. Accounts of people's experience were needed to bring the statistics to life. This led us to decide to collect the stories using a life-work-history method.

We decided to concentrate on exploring what happens when people have good creative experiences of *avec* and to tease out what makes for such experiences. In other words to research what works rather than what does not work. Of course, as nothing works perfectly, the stories also showed what did not work and what would not have worked for these people.

There were several things that we needed to know in order to understand, illustrate and explore what happened to practitioners and their work when the *avec* approach really worked for them and those with whom they were involved. The following questions were ones which we felt would get people to tell the kind of stories we needed.

- How did you come to have an experience of Avec and its approach?
- What did you feel about it at the time?
- What did it mean to you?
- Did anything significant occur as a consequence?
- What has been the subsequent effect, usefulness, value of anything you gained from your Avec experience(s)?

¹ *Viva l'avec: A Service Agency for Church and Community Work*, MARC Europe Report

- Have you been able to use the approach with people of different backgrounds, education and culture?
- In what ways did the approach gel or jar with your beliefs?
- Is there anything that came out of your experiences that you wish to say to the wider Church?
- Do you wish to say anything else?

Choosing a representative sample was difficult. Criteria used were: gender; denomination; status – lay, religious, ordained to diaconal and presbyteral ministries; variety of work and situations; period over which the *avec* approach had been experienced and practised; availability and willingness to be interviewed. We were spoilt for choice. Hundreds of possibilities were reduced to a short list of eighty. Principal features of the group of eighteen that we recruited are described above.

Gradually, as the interviews proceeded, it became clear that through these questions we were exploring two different but complementary experiences of the approach and therefore two fundamental questions. The first was the experience of being on the receiving end as it were, of the *avec* approach on Avec courses or in Avec consultancy sessions. The second kind of experience was of the practitioners themselves using the *avec* approach in their own work and in training and consultancy situations.

All the stories, therefore, refer to the same approaches, methods, body of knowledge, practice theory and theology. Naturally, staff members used these idiosyncratically and each event had its own characteristics and ethos. Of course, the experiences of those interviewed varied. Nonetheless there was an underlying consistency of approach and a stable but ever developing corpus of core concepts which together formed common reference points.² However, there was a disadvantage in this. The experience of being on the receiving end of someone using the *avec* approach was equated or confused with the experience of Avec. People quite unconnected with Avec can and do use an *avec* approach. The relationship between agency and approach can be dissolved. Indeed Avec's effectiveness depended upon the umbilical cord between them being severed.

An allied danger is that of equating or confusing the *avec* approach or the experience of Avec with those through whom they were mediated. There are real dangers and major disadvantages in personalising approaches and movements. It is a simplistic resolution of the complex interplay between approach, agency and staff which can lead to a personality cult. In turn that can cause people to assume that the approach is simply for people with a particular personality. The stories in this book are palpable evidence that this is not the case. The approach can be married to any personality and the union will take on its own character. Distinguishing between approach, agency and staff helps to objectify each and to examine the interaction between them, the ways in which they are embodied in each other and their different subjectivities.

² Professor Gillian Stamp of Brunel Institute of Organization and Social Studies (BIOSS), considers that the accumulative Avec experience from the flexible and wide ranging application of a consistent approach over a period of twenty years provides invaluable data.

My purpose is to portray essentials of the nature and value of the approach through relating stories of what the *avec* approach has meant to people differing significantly from each other in temperament, theology, churchmanship and situation. And in this way to indicate that it is generic and universal.

What were we going to do with the stories when we had got them? That was a question we struggled with in the Research Support Group. There were several possible ways of proceeding. One was to determine in advance the points we wished to make, and collect and edit the stories to demonstrate those points. Another was to extract from the stories key points, use them to establish the structure of the book and use the stories to illustrate the points. A third possibility was the one we chose after much thought. It was to let those interviewed and their stories speak for themselves. We needed and wanted to get at the genuine core of the experience of a group of people and to communicate it as honestly as possible through the written version of their verbal statements. Everything possible was done to achieve this.

From the outset of the interviews it was clearly understood by all concerned that the material would remain confidential to the Research Support Group and to myself and that it would be used for wider publication only with the express permission of the person who had given the interview. One of the effects of this was that people felt sufficiently secure to explore things openly and freely.

Stories were obtained by tape recording extended personal interviews with each person. Catherine Widdicombe interviewed two people, Maureen Connor and Brian Woodcock. I interviewed the others. Our aim was to get people to recall their experiences and to reflect upon them. Those we interviewed had prior notice of the principal questions mentioned earlier. This gave the overall structure of the sessions. All the questions were open ones; leading and loaded questions were avoided. Questions were aimed at getting them to talk freely about their experience. We did not pre-determine what we wanted to get out of the interviews: we did not have a list of points that we wished to illustrate. What we wanted was for them to tell their stories honestly and to encourage them to go beneath the surface. That was made abundantly clear. We went back to several people to explore things further through second interviews and correspondence. Persistently we pressed people to tell us about any difficulties they had experienced related to beliefs and practice.

At times we had to exercise considerable discipline over ourselves to stay in role. At several points we were seriously tempted to move into a work consultancy mode. All our instincts, experience and interests were pushing us in that direction. Somehow we managed to keep sufficiently in role during the interviews. Afterwards we reverted to type!

The tapes of the interviews were transcribed. Each person received a copy of their interview. Copies were also sent to the members of my Research Support Group. Then I edited the transcripts, converting the question-answer conversation into a continuous narrative as spoken by the person interviewed. A copy of this was sent to the person interviewed and to each member of the Group. I wrote an introduction and drew out points of significance. A copy of this, too, was sent to the person interviewed and to each member of the Group. This process stimulated dialogue between

us which contributed much to this book. Agreed versions of the stories are reproduced here. In all essentials they are as they were originally told and I have the evidence to prove it! As far as possible, the spoken style of contributors was preserved in the extensive editing of transcripts. We were concerned that the accounts remained what they were, stories that were told, not written. And that means some untidiness.

When asked for permission to publish, two contributors were hesitant. They wanted their stories to be told to further a cause to which they were committed. But they felt diffident about going into print because they had spoken about personal matters from the heart, because they might appear to be more capable than they felt and because they reacted negatively to their own words in print. The suggestion that I should note this assuaged their feelings and they freely gave permission to publish. I understand their feelings because in a very real sense these stories are part of my story and that of Avec. I feel considerable diffidence about some of the complimentary things said but I was under strict instructions not to delete them.

After the most careful consideration one person felt unable to give permission for her story to be published under her own name. Her main reasons were that she did not want to risk the possibility of reactivating conflict, undoing progress gained at a high price and hurting people unnecessarily. Eventually, because my Research Support Group and I felt that it was so important, the person concerned decided to allow it to be published pseudonymously. It makes a unique contribution even though inevitably something has been lost by disguising it.

The significance of this small collection is greatly enhanced because there are untold numbers of similar stories. The objective evidence for this is documented by unsolicited testimonies, in-house evaluations by members of courses and staff over a period of almost twenty years and by the MARC Europe survey already mentioned. Thousands of people have contributed to this accumulative assessment: clergy, religious, lay people of ten denominations; men and women working at all levels on a wide range of work throughout the U.K. and in some thirty other countries.

The stories form by far the greatest part of this book. Each story has a brief introduction and a postscript highlighting significant features. They are grouped under chapter headings: collaborative ministry; working *with* people in parishes in areas of deprivation; changes in organizations; consultations about vocation and work. But most stories break out of the boundaries of one chapter into the others.

The next section gives background information which helps readers to understand frequent references to Avec courses and services and the *avec* approach. In Chapter VI, as an aid to reflection, I summarise and chart the stories, the changes that occurred and the issues and subjects discussed. Then, in the Appendix, for those who are interested in pursuing the approach further, the resources available for them to do so are indicated.

AVEC, AGENCY AND APPROACH

This section sketches out aspects of the common background to the stories, Avec, and describes the things to which frequent reference is made. Thus, it is a glossary of terms. The aim is to help those unacquainted with Avec to understand the stories

more readily and more fully. However, the stories speak for themselves. They can be read with profit without any background knowledge. You may well prefer to skip this section, especially if you are acquainted with the agency and the approach, and use it for elucidation as necessary.

Avec's origins go back to the early sixties and to a comparatively small group of people who, on theological and practical grounds, were disenchanted with directive, authoritarian and paternalistic approaches. They were attracted to the non-directive approach to working with people as practised by Dr T. R. Batten and Mrs M. Batten, with its central concept of working *with* rather than *for* people. All their experience said that this was needed in the Church and by the Church in its work in the community. It tallied with their Christian faith. They studied it; they attended training courses run by the Battens; they tested it out in their church and community work; some of them researched it. I was one of those people. Catherine Widdicombe was another.

From 1966-72 I was a Methodist Minister in South London. During this time I wrote a doctoral thesis on my work as the minister of a local church. It showed that the non-directive approach was instrumental in bringing a dying church alive to itself and its neighbourhood. The approach has been a principal force in twenty-five years of remarkable developments in what became known as Parchmore Methodist Church, Youth and Community Centre.³

Whilst I was working in Parchmore, Catherine Widdicombe was heading up the late Archbishop Worlock's secretarial team at the Second Vatican Council in Rome. The experience changed her profoundly. She threw herself enthusiastically into playing her part in implementing the findings of the Council. Gradually she came to the conclusion that priests and lay people would have to learn how to act non-directively. This was an enormous undertaking for people formed and schooled in an authoritarian system.

Catherine Widdicombe and I first met in the late sixties. I had tested out the Battens' approach in one denomination. On the course she designed an action-research project to test out the approach in other denominations. It became known as Project 70-75. An ecumenical team, of which I was a member, was formed in 1969 to carry out this Project. This team worked with the clergy and laity in one typical Council of Churches area in North London on their schemes and projects and it ran training courses for them. The ministers, priests and laity of the sixteen churches involved concluded that the approach was highly applicable to all aspects of the work of their denominations: Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Church of Christ, Methodist, Moravian, Roman Catholic and United Reformed.

All this convinced Methodist and Roman Catholic authorities that an agency was needed to promote this approach throughout the Church. Avec was inaugurated in 1976 to do that. By common consent it has made major contributions to the life and work of all the main denominations through the provision of work consultancy and training services.

Avec's Stance on Church and Community Development

Avec staff believed in the Church, its ministry and mission. It was their organization. They loved it even though they were aware of its deficiencies. They held office in it. They were variously commissioned, ordained, supported and employed by it. It was the base from which they sought to work for betterment. They had discovered that the Church could make unrivalled contributions to human and spiritual development far beyond itself when it drew upon the insights, approaches and methods associated with the newly emerging discipline of community development. They had also discovered that this discipline could help clergy, religious and lay people to work more effectively with their own members and to promote theological reflection. They were staunchly committed to working *with* the church as a whole for the common good. They aimed to get ministers, religious and lay people at all levels working purposefully together on equal terms with others in society for the interrelated development of

- church and community;
- Christians and non-Christians;
- people and their environment;
- the human and the spiritual.

Doing this involved promoting the practice of the profession of Christian ministry – lay and ordained, individual and collective – in secular and religious settings. Figure 1 expresses this diagrammatically in what has become a hallmark of the *avec* approach.

Adopting the approaches sketched out below led practitioners to set their work in a wider setting: to see their church or organization and their position in it as a base from which to work for betterment of all within their area. That area might be a parish, a circuit, a diocese/district, a denomination. The overall objective was to work for the human and spiritual well-being and common good of all the people in their organization and area.

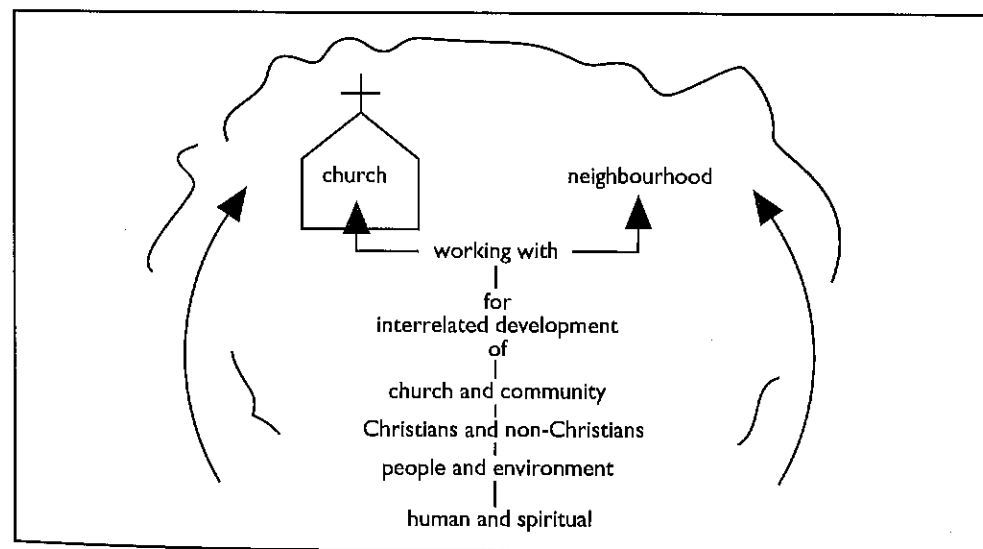


Figure 1: Interrelated Development

³ The story is told in *The Parchmore Partnership*, by George Lovell, Garth Rogers and Peter Sharrocks. Edited by Malcolm Grundy (Chester House Publications, 1995)

This gave a broad based perspective on ministry and mission which led to working holistically with different religious and social systems. Clearly it was quite different from working in the church, for the church, with the church and serving the congregation only. It included these things and all that goes with them such as Christian education and pastoral care. It was also different from getting churches and their members engaged in community work simply to get more people to attend church – however desirable an outcome that might have been. Essentially it was about getting people themselves to make the places and organizations in which they live, work, worship, relax and die the best possible places that they can be – places in which people find satisfaction for their personal, social and spiritual needs and in which they love and care for one another. It was about building human and spiritual community and the social and religious organizations which sustain and service it. In short it was about Christians working to and for the whole through “their” part of it.

Basic Elements

Particular reference is made in these stories to eight basic aspects of Avec and its courses and services. They are:

1. the non-directive approach and worker
2. work consultancy
3. ten-day courses
4. work paper groups and sessions
5. missionary and final furlough courses
6. action-research
7. the diploma courses
8. the avec approach to church and community development.

1. The non-directive approach and worker

At the heart of the non-directive approach is the desire and the commitment to get people to think, decide and act for themselves in the light of as much information as they can handle. This involves emphasizing the need to work *with* people as well as *for* them. Dr T. R. Batten coined the phrase. For him non-directive workers aim to help all kinds of people, separately and together, to think seriously, deeply, analytically, imaginatively and purposefully for themselves about the substance of work, life and faith and to act upon their conclusions.

The stories and reflections show that this approach is as positive as the title is negative. I have searched for an alternative title but with no success so far. Speaking of the *avec* approach, i.e. the “with” approach, is the best alternative so far.

2. Work consultancy

Broadly speaking work consultancy is to practitioners and their work what counselling is to people and their lives. It is a particular application of the non-directive approach. Consultants (those who are consulted) help consultors (those who are consulting) to think through aspects of their work and what they feel about it and to decide what action to take and how to take it. Non-directive work consultancy enables consultants and consultors to be vigorously proactive in ways which help consultors to be more creatively active in their own right. It facilitates the bonding of consultants and consultors

necessary for consultancy sessions and the freedom necessary for consultors to be independent practitioners beyond and between consultancy sessions.

3. Ten-day courses

Avec's ten-day courses were work consultancy courses. They were not exercises in “group dynamics,” or “T groups” or “sensitivity training”. But, like consultancy sessions, they involved examining not only work but personal and socio-religious relationships between people in churches and community groups.

All these courses had certain basic elements in common but each was tailored to the particular needs of its members. They were generally held in two periods of five days separated by a month or so. Ideally they comprised a group of twelve to eighteen people with two or three staff members. Beforehand members were required, by way of guided preparation, to write a paper on their work. During the course, members and staff studied systematically each work situation in turn.

Another principal aspect of this kind of course was the critical analysis of ideas about theory, theology and practice of working with people in churches, organizations and communities for spiritual and human development. Combined with this was a critical evaluation of the course members' experience of the approaches and methods used by Avec staff. Throughout the aim was to enable members to decide precisely what implications all this might have for them, their work and their churches and organizations.

As the work of Avec evolved, adaptations of this basic model formed the basis for courses for specific groups. For instance there were courses for those working regionally, nationally and internationally. But the greater majority of these courses were for mixed ecumenical groups of people working at various levels in different kinds of work.

4. Work paper groups and sessions

By common consent the most significant part of these courses was the study of the papers members had to write about their work situation. This was done in what we called “work paper” groups which had around six members. Time was allocated exclusively to each member in turn and his/her work situation (normally a short tutorial, a 1½ hour and a 20 minute group work session during each of two weeks separated by about a month). They followed a set sequence of tasks. First they sought to understand how the practitioner thought and felt about his/her work. (To see it through her/his eyes. To stand in her/his shoes. To empathise with her/him.) Second they analysed the underlying dynamics of the situation. Third they helped the practitioner to determine what action s/he can and wants to take. (Not what they would do if they were in the situation which is of little value because they were not the person concerned and they were not in the situation!) So they worked through a sequence of activities – describing, analysing, synthesising, designing and deciding what action to take.

Studying situations in this way was a fascinating but demanding discipline. It involved the creative interaction of the practitioner's and the group members' perspectives of his/her situation. Once people got the hang of this it was quite exciting to see them trying out this and that suggestion, teasing out why a suggestion did not fit and then trying another one until something did fall into place.

5. Missionary and final furlough courses

Avec organized courses in collaboration with the Methodist Church Overseas Division for missionaries returning from overseas to work in the United Kingdom. These were variously known as missionary and final furlough courses. They were residential courses for missionaries, their spouses and families. The first part was a five-day course soon after they returned and before they started work in this country. It concentrated on the transition, debriefing, rehabilitation, preparation for the work they were going to take up. The second part was a five-day course about a year later which focussed on what had happened to them during their first year in this country and the work in which they were engaged, this they examined very much as people did on the ten-day courses. Later there were courses for people on furlough who were to return to work overseas to enable them to study the work in which they were engaged.

6. Action-research

Action-research is a way of continuously assessing work done in church and community for what can be learnt from it, and ploughing back whatever is learnt to inform future decisions and actions. Practitioners collect data through their role as non-directive "participant observers", sometimes active at other times passive. They are ideally placed to explore, from within, the processes by which positive and negative changes occur and the sequence of events which lead to them. They are their own research instruments.

Action-research methods were widely used in Avec. They helped staff and Associates to develop Avec as an organization and to evaluate and refine its courses and services. Full and part-time staff members used them to research their work for higher degrees. Each member of the diploma course described below, undertook a programme of action-research on an aspect of their church and community work.

7. The diploma course

The two-year part-time diploma course was inaugurated in 1986. It was taught at Avec by Avec staff and validated by Roehampton Institute. Members were enabled to write their own study and research proposals, to examine the theory, theology and practice of church and community development through seminars, some of which they themselves led, to study action research approaches and methods which they used to examine critical aspects of their work and to write essays, position papers and a dissertation.

8. The avec approach to church and community development

"Avec" is not an acronym. As we noted earlier it is simply French for "with", chosen to represent the central concept of working *with* people for human and spiritual well-being and development in church and community. Avec embodied, represented and promoted this way of working and the spirituality it engenders. Its aim was to get clergy, religious and laity, churches and Christian organizations to do the same. "Avec" soon came to be used in two distinct but complementary ways: to refer to an organization in the King's Road; to describe what Avec is all about as there is no single term that describes it adequately. This double usage threads its way through this book because it was part of the vocabulary of those who told their stories. Avec is used

when the reference is to the first meaning, an organization. *Avec* or *avec* is used when referring to the second meaning, the approach which for many became a way of life expressed through a distinctive work culture. It is the second of these meanings that is important because it is of far wider significance than Avec as an organization. *Avec*, as an approach and philosophy, as an aspect of pastoral and applied theology and as a movement outlives Avec as an organization. Indeed, Avec's *raison d'être* was to promote the *avec* way of working in religious and, through them, in secular organizations.

Aims in Using These Methods

There were several things which we in Avec hoped to achieve through the use of these approaches and methods. We wanted to enable all kinds of people to work *with* others for human and spiritual development. We wished to create an environment conducive to practitioners, consultants and trainers using work study tools to promote thoughtful developmental action. We wanted to help practitioners to study their working situations critically at a particular moment in time and over a period of time. We wanted to give participants in Avec's courses experiences of the non-directive approach and the work study tools and opportunities to assess them and to begin to learn how to use them. We wanted them to draw upon anything which might help them from the body of knowledge which Avec had accumulated from their experience of, and studies in, church and community development. We were concerned that practitioners formulated their own practice-theory. We wanted them to develop their work consultancy skills. We wanted them to be able to use action-research methods in their work. In short we wished clergy, religious and laity to become even better reflective practitioners able to develop reflective religious and secular communities.

Now read the stories to see the progress made in relation to these aims.

Avec started in September 1976 with two full-time staff members, plans for two or three courses and promises of grants to cover the shortfall for the first two or three years. The staff, Miss Catherine Widdicombe, a member of the Grail Community and the Revd Dr George Lovell, a Methodist Minister, were working from their homes. By 1991, when George Lovell retired as director to become the research worker until 1993, Avec was a well-established service agency with a group of associate and part-time staff, a London base – offices, seminar room and a small specialist library. It had conducted over 300 courses ranging from half-day conferences to a two-year part-time post-graduate diploma in church and community development with ten-day work and theory courses as the central core of the programme. It had also provided consultancy services to or worked on some 130 projects mostly in this country but some in Africa and Ireland. All this meant that Avec had worked with over 7,500 people of ten denominations – almost 4,000 Roman Catholics, 2,000 Methodists and 1,500 Anglicans.

These services were used by people at all levels (5,000 at local and 2,500 at regional and national levels), by clergy (2,800), religious, deaconesses and church workers (3,800) and lay people (1,000). The subject matter was varied – it included most forms of local church and community work and specialist work with, for example, profoundly deaf people and travellers. There were courses for specific groups such as missionaries (on furlough and returning), religious (for superiors and provincials) and people working at regional and national levels. This work was undertaken by the two full-time staff members supported by one or two part-time staff, associate trainers and by a small administrative staff.

According to an independent survey by MARC Europe, Avec courses and consultancy services were generally very well received. They were still appreciated years after clients attended them, and were found to be helpful, practical and life-changing.

Avec had three full-time workers: George Lovell (1976–1993); Catherine Widdicombe (1976–1992); Malcolm Grundy (1991–1994). In 1994 the Trustees decided that Avec must cease to trade due to financial difficulties. Four things remain. The **Avec Association** provides some training and consultancy services. The **Avec Reference Library**, housed at Westminster College, offers an unusual collection of books on church and community development. **Avec Publications** and **Avec Resources** provide a range of books and papers.

Avec: Agency and Approach by George Lovell (An Avec Publication, 1996) describes what made and marred the agency during the period 1976–91.

Display 1. A Note About Avec and Its Services

Chapter Two COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

These stories are about difficulties, realities and rewards of pursuing collaborative ministry in Haiti, in urban and suburban areas of Britain, in an evangelical training college and in Northern Ireland during the height of the troubles. Three of the contributors are Methodist ministers and one is a priest from the Church of Ireland. At the time of interview their experience of the *avec* approach ranged from fourteen to twenty-three years. For all of them it had become a way of working and living.



One:
THE MINISTER AS TECHNOCRAT
Leslie Griffiths

Leslie Griffiths is a Methodist minister at Wesley's Chapel, in London's City Road. I interviewed him during his year as President of the Methodist Conference, 1994–95. At fifty-three he was one of the youngest Presidents and the only one in an ordinary Circuit appointment in living memory. He is a regular broadcaster and a prolific writer. He has broadcast regularly on "Thought for the Day" and he writes a monthly column for the Methodist Recorder. The first four years of his ministry were spent in Haiti. He returned there for a further three year tour after three years in local church work in Reading. He speaks French and Creole. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Dr Griffiths became personal friends through broadcasting in Creole on the BBC World Service. From the beginning of his ministry he has been a campaigner for social and political justice, especially in Haiti. He is chairman of Christian Aid's African and Middle East Committee, a committee member of Heythrop Institute of Spirituality, a trustee of the Addiction Recovery Foundation, a director of Birnbeck Housing Association... and so on and on. First and foremost, however, he is a preacher and orator. This wealth of experience, and the breadth of the perspective that accompanies it, adds significance to what he says about the *avec* approach.

Leslie makes clear the nature of our relationship. I was his minister when he was a boy in Burry Port at the outset of my ministry. He attended the church, literally a tin

tabernacle on a vast abandoned railway siding by a derelict port outside Llanelli. Many years later he was a member of a team I led which was responsible for a project entitled "Relationships in Mission". The aim was to promote deeper levels of interdependence between the Overseas Division of the British Methodist Church and Methodist Churches in West Africa. Three consultations were held between the Methodist Church Overseas Division and the Methodist Churches in Sierra Leone (1984), in Ghana (1985) and in Nigeria (1986). His job was to help plan the consultations, to record them and to write them up. All things he did superbly. As the discussions proceeded he wrote a comprehensive record, not notes, in finely sculpted sentences and paragraphs. Doing that involved something which now seems so 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.

As stated earlier, Dr Griffiths is a member of my Research Support Group. It was the other members who suggested I interview him. As always, he responded willingly and generously. I interviewed him in his home in February 1995.

Leslie Griffiths' Reflections, February 1995

Unlike other people you'll have spoken to, in my case, my interest in the non-directive approach to community development can't be unwrapped from my knowing you from rather early in my life. I don't think that there was a Damascus Road experience in one sense. I remember the way that you came to Burry Port almost forty years ago and talked about Sunday School teaching and youth work and things like that. You were working in a way that was entirely different from the way that we were accustomed to having anybody work. Leadership was from the front. It was simply spelling out wisdom that the person from the front had and we were quite happy with that and unquestioning. That was our culture. We sat in pews and were talked to from pulpits. That is part of the Welsh tradition of sitting and listening to sermons.

You used to come with cars full of papers and things to hang up. You'd get us to answer questions and you'd write them on bits of paper. You had illustrations you'd cut from different places and there was a visual content. You made us look at things and you did interact. You asked questions. Now that wasn't the fully blown *avec* approach but it was so distinctly different from any way that we had worked or had anyone work with us, and, as I said earlier, for me to sit as a boy because that is all I was, in a congregation mainly of middle-aged women and to see them engaged, not just sitting there receiving, was an education.

You involved us in working out what was happening and you somehow included our energy in ways that we weren't used to in Burry Port. I noticed how your way of working impacted on a very traditional group who were not used to it at all. I saw what it did to them. I saw how it brought from them comments on things about which I would have assumed they didn't have anything to say. They were very intelligently engaged. Absolutely brilliant stuff. When they said things like, "Oh I don't think we could do that," they were then asked, "Well, why?" It was just fascinating to see them taken seriously as participants in achieving whatever it was that they were doing. I shall never forget the process even though I've forgotten the content. It was visual and it was interactive and the people really did get stuck in. They did answer

questions, they did come in with their own points of view. I had simply never seen anything like it. I would never have imagined that it could happen that way. One or two people opted out entirely, perhaps that's the shadow side.

So, right back in the mists of time in the year that King Uzziah died, I remember my eyes being opened to something new that was happening in the way that you worked. Now I just feel that that has been developed by our subsequent relationship.

What I have noticed from reading what you write is that, really, you are elaborating common sense. It just seems so straight forward, down to earth. Sometimes your sentences are longer than other people's but at the same time you are telling us what we all know really and it is a terrific revelation to us to discover that we know the things that you are helping us to see. So that you are putting us in touch with something inside ourselves from those earliest beginnings right through to the setting up of Avec.

I must say I wanted to do a ten-day course in 1977 because I was going to be doing something quite different. I was going back to Haiti for a second period as a missionary. I needed to be ahead of the game this time. I got sucked into Haiti the previous time in ways that left me a pretty bewildered person. I was not going to go back to Haiti this time and allow myself to become a kind of leader of people's liberation movements and to be trusted to do things that Haitians had to do for themselves. That is where I went wrong during my first appointment. I had got to speak the language so well that I had become sucked into the culture. I deeply yearned for the people to be liberated from the dictatorship. They were trusting me to say things they didn't dare say for themselves. And I had allowed myself to become implicated in that way. It was wrong and I left because I didn't think I could sustain that any longer. When I was preparing to go back I knew that I couldn't go back and repeat all that or go into those pits again.

What I desperately needed was to think through what the new job was and to set some reasonable objectives. I knew that I had to enter into the new job on what I'd call a more technocratic sort of basis. I needed help with the transition from Reading to Haiti and from one style of working in Haiti to another. So there were two transitions that were going to take place. Those are the things I worked at during the Avec course I went on. There were two blocks of five days at the Leysian Mission. That led me into a formal relationship with Avec. After that, of course, I have met with the Associates and had a continuing relationship with Avec right through the years.

What happened the first time round in Haiti was that I went as a clever young man and learned that my cleverness was no use. I was totally de-skilled, completely disempowered. When I say a clever young man, I mean I felt I was a clever young man. I was quite arrogant in fact, very self assured. I had been ten years in University life, I had a head that could think and a voice that could speak. I honestly thought that I was God's gift to the world. All those bits of me had been fed by the kind of life I had led: you come from nowhere to taking a degree at Cambridge University and you feel you can do everything. Well, I was like that. And the very first thing that happened to me was I was completely stripped of power, I couldn't speak the language. I spoke fluent French and they put me in a circuit where nobody spoke

French. So here I was with 48 churches and a community of 250,000 people, the whole Haitian population, and no skills whatsoever, absolutely none.

From that base I began to discover the people I needed to help give me skills. It was a terrific time for me. I had to think this one through very carefully. The people I found to give me skills, to give me survival skills, were illiterate Haitian peasants. That is an extraordinary thing. They taught me their language, Creole. They taught me their culture. They taught me how to identify the fruits and vegetables you could eat. They taught me what day the boat came in with this and that and what time of the week that happened. They taught me how to get to places and who the important people were to meet and how to go about things, what protocol was, how to identify flora and fauna. They told me their folk tales and their culture, everything.

But, you know, this arrogant person was stripped down to nothing. There were times really when I wondered if I could survive. I can now tell the story in a way that gives a little frisson of delight to people, this brave Leslie Griffiths who did all that. But it wasn't brave at all you know. I was shivering in my shoes. Margaret and I cried ourselves to sleep more than once. We simply didn't know what on earth we had let ourselves in for. I now recognise that that was laying bare Leslie Griffiths. The illiterate people of Haiti did for Leslie Griffiths what all the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't do for Humpty Dumpty. They put him back together again. They put me in touch with my poor beginnings. They reminded me who I was. They took the veneer that I was hiding behind away from me and here was I, this vulnerable, exposed creature in Haiti. Now from there I am bound to say I just went one step at a time where the path took me. I wasn't in charge of anything. It took me deeper and deeper into an identification with Haiti that in the end couldn't possibly lead me anywhere. I didn't have enough detachment from it to work with it.

So whilst I think the Haitians came to love me very much, and I certainly to this day love them, I didn't think that after four years of that I was going to be terribly useful to them or to myself. I was just making burdens for myself that I couldn't possibly carry. At the end of the day I was being trusted to do things that a foreigner shouldn't be trusted to do. I was articulating their anger at the regime for example. And, being white and in contact with the big outside world, I was bringing in aid in ways that bypassed their engagement with the processes. So they would want to use me as the mechanism that brought them money and help. Whereas just doing it like that wasn't the right way to do things at all. I had got into this sorry mess. I hadn't the detachment necessary for me to be more critical of myself and the process. So that is the way I worked the first time.

During that first period we had Americans working in Haiti on community development projects. They were simply doing pieces of paternalism and appeasing their consciences from a distance. They weren't engaging with Haitian people at all. That angered me. These were my beloved Haitians and they were treating them this way and I couldn't cope with my feelings about that either. I came back in 1974 and I knew that I had to let Haiti go. Ostensibly we had come back for good. But I couldn't let Haiti go and Haiti couldn't let me go because a lot of the stuff I have just described was unresolved, I simply hadn't dealt with it. (We didn't go on the Avec 'final furlough course' where we would have worked at it because I came back in the

middle of August and I started work on the 1st September.) I had simply run away from it and the good Lord put us to live in Reading on the flight path from Heathrow to the United States of America so every other plane that went over took me with it. I was not an easy person to live with in those years. I knew I had to deal with the unresolved issue. Alan Kirton, who was about to become the chairman of the Haiti district, came from his French lessons in Paris and stayed with me in Reading. He said, "Leslie I want you to go back, it is important that you go back. There is a job to do, this Circuit will fall into the ground if you don't come back. We need somebody who can speak the language and knows the culture. So I want you to come back right now." I think that the decision to go back was the hardest decision I have ever made because Margaret didn't want to. But I knew that I couldn't return simply to continue where I left off. I perceived the ten-day course to be an important place where I could think these things through. I don't think even then, you can look up the papers to check this, I was on top of things sufficiently for me to give you the depth of analysis of what happened in my first tour that I have just given you. I have needed ten years to think that one through. But at the time I knew it had to be. I had to go back as a technocrat. I had to go back to do a job. I had to go back with the right mixture of detachment and involvement.

Phenomenally, and possibly unbelievably, I got what I needed from that course. I remember the course graphically to this day. I remember your spidery drawings expanding exponentially in all directions. Again, the method is so simple. It starts by each of the participants having adequate time to explain their situation, and I did feel it was adequate. Certainly nobody had listened to me for that long ever about my work. And that is a great sign of our poverty when you realise that we don't have time to think about our work in the way that the course made us think about it. We are more and more conscious of interpersonal listening at the level of counselling and therapy and all that kind of stuff. But we don't apply those skills or those insights to the work we do. As far as I am concerned, simply to write a paper and to have people whose work I was going to look at in due course, look undividedly at my work, was a revelation to me. They asked questions that were raised by the paper I wrote. They extrapolated from what I had written. Why is this going to be like you say it is going to be? Tell us what led you to describe this in this particular way? I have never had that quality of attention given to my own work before and that is what I remember about it particularly. It made me think through things that I thought I had thought through. It made me engage with the piece of work myself in an entirely new way. Writing the work paper was an exercise but studying the work with others was much more than that. It was as if I, like the others, was sitting around the thing, and working at it. That really was a revelation to me. I shall always remember it. It genuinely did spew out a number of action points that were helpful as bench markers when I went to do the work.

I was going back to look after a Circuit that had fallen on very bad times. It seemed to have very little capacity to survive the transitional times between its ministers. It was minister dependent. And yet it had schools and all kinds of things. It was very important to find other ways of working. Three over-riding objectives emerged from that exercise. Number one, there was a financial debt that somehow had to be cancelled. The Circuit had important pieces of property that had all fallen

into disrepair. That led to another practical objective, that property had to be put right. There was another objective which was about the "how" rather than the "what". We had to find ways of achieving the first two objectives that didn't simply magic the problem away but somehow involved the local people in achieving the solution. It would be a mixture of local people and people from outside because they couldn't generate those kinds of money from within. But what had not to happen was that, suddenly, I found the sixteen or twenty thousand dollars that represented the debt and made the books good and nobody knew what had happened. So there was a third objective and this was the most important in many, many ways. We had to find a team of people in the Haitian Circuit who would represent the leadership of that Circuit. The minister would be one of that team. It would be my job to get that team together, to put the working methods of that team on to a proper basis for it to be truly collaborative and for it to have a real handle on power so that it was not the minister being surrounded by his lackeys. When those three objectives to do with the debt, the properties and the leadership of the Circuit had been achieved, it would be time for me to leave.

One of the things that is quite amazing is that none of the other members of the group had been to Haiti. But then I hadn't been to Stepney where another group member came from and I hadn't been to somewhere out in Essex or Hertfordshire either.

Identifying transforming objectives is one thing, achieving them is another. Here again the process was singularly helpful. The very way we worked in order to identify the objectives – and of course it wasn't just around my piece of work, it was around half a dozen other pieces of work – gave important clues about how to achieve them.

There was a process of cross examination. Questions were asked for clarification. Alternative points of view were expressed. As we sat around each particular piece of work that was identified on the table, it seemed to me that the way in which we gave our total attention to it was telling me something about how to achieve the very objectives that were coming out of the consideration of my piece of work. So I think that the way we worked as well as the conclusions we reached were the two over-riding things that I drew from that ten-day course.

When I went to Haiti with these three objectives in my head, it was clear to me that the way I had to work was to help people within their context to achieve these objectives. First of all they had to identify them for themselves. Two were very clear, their buildings were falling down and they couldn't pay their school teachers because they had an overdraft. Those imposed themselves on them. There was no way out of that. There wasn't too much difficulty either, in helping them to understand and own the other objective. They quickly saw the value of us meeting in a group and gradually feeling our way towards a group that was truly representative, that was able to come on a weekly basis, that could look at the managerial and all the other problems. But they didn't believe at first that I was serious about wanting to share power with them. I made it clear to them, for example, that the question of teachers' salaries was something we must and would decide, not I, which was the previous way of working. They came to see that they had real power and real responsibility. So, those methods of work, as well as the objectives, became very important in Haiti.

They accepted that responsibility. They discharged it extremely well. It was wonderful to see the creeping realisation and joy overtake them that they were there to achieve an important purpose. I personally believe the process I was engaged with in such a humble way in the Cap Haitien Circuit is precisely the process that the whole nation of Haiti needs currently to be engaged in as it moves from one way of running the country to another. And some of the problems they have fallen into have been because old rather stereotypical ways of exercising and imposing power have been allowed to create their own polarities and their own problems. So I think that we were able to show in our humble way how in Haiti, so easily dismissed and castigated, the skills and the energies do in fact exist to create good community development.

What needed to happen in Haiti was that the participants had to come to the belief that games weren't being played with them. Historically, people from those strata of Haitian society are play-things. If they are given power it is as a mask behind which the real power holders make their plays on power. So you really had to make them struggle to understand that we were genuine, we were not play acting. And I found this an outlet for my intellectual and human skills. So I didn't feel as if I were the kind giant in a small world, we were equals around this table.

At first they themselves couldn't or refused to believe that they were being "given" power. Everything that was in their culture persuaded them that they were here as tokens or whatever. It was when they were actually involved in some things that they had never seen or been aware of before that they came to realise that they were being taken seriously. I am thinking of disciplining somebody, or dismissing somebody from our work force for example, or the annual pay round for teachers, or the decisions about re-opening a school, or the decisions to re-build a school or looking at our accounts – they had never seen the books. Another thing that convinced them was when views that I put forward were overruled and their decisions were accepted. I fought for my view within the discussion. But when it was clear that it wasn't the way to go and I said, "I hear clearly what you say and perhaps we ought to be considering what you have said as the basis on which to act." When they understood that I was prepared to do that, it was clear to them that we were engaged in serious methods of work. And all the time it was in their language. So they had the advantage of speaking in their own language and working in their own culture. There was no doubt about that. And I was the only non-Haitian in the group.

It took three years to achieve these three objectives. The debt wasn't a problem. The buildings were fantastic, we repaired everything, we built everything. They called me the "Reverend Concrete", "Pastor Béton". We were building schools all over the place in the end. We had Americans come over in large numbers to help us to build and they brought lots of money. But I refused to let them be the patrons and to be in positions of leadership and so on. The only work I would let them do was work that they could do on the basis of total equality with their Haitian colleagues. So, they would be pouring cement or laying blocks or sawing wood and always there would be Americans and Haitians in equal numbers working together alongside each other. Now, for many from the south of the United States of America, it was the first time they had ever worked with blacks in this way at all. Every night I would go to the hotel where the Americans were staying, in order to debrief them. Once I had to send an American home because

I could not accept his racism. I said, "Tomorrow you get a plane and go home and you will take no further part in this exercise." In other words, I was trying very hard to work with the Americans who came that they might also understand the spirit in which they must do this work. And it was really very, very fruitful and that is all I can say. Of course, that helped the Haitians to understand too, that they had a real part to play in achieving these objectives, that their work was honourable. I insisted on paying the Haitians a proper daily rate. We were touched at the end when the church members amongst the work-force, because they weren't all church members, gave back a percentage of what they had earned as their contribution to the programme.

There were things the Haitians could not do for themselves. I had to set up the contact and the networking. I had to bring the Americans down. I had to discipline them. But I have to say that within the Haitian team with which I was working week by week, permission had been given to me to exercise these roles.

I never hid from them any of the contacts I was engaged in. Now and again, for example, it would be agreed that I would go up to the United States to raise some money and to talk to particular groups. Certain things would happen up there in the States that I couldn't consult with them about. When I came back I had to be quite sure that they were in the picture about what was happening and that they weren't bewildered by the pace at which it happened, because it was a phenomenal time. All that I did, was as a member of that team.

It was a very enlightening time. I learnt lessons from that which have been enlightening in terms of certain experiences I have had back here since. The language of collaborative styles of ministry is around and often it is mere empty rhetoric. I have found far less readiness, sometimes, in certain staff-team situations here in England to give me permission to do what I'm good at. Whereas the Haitians were delighted to give me that permission and were still prepared to contest my point of view. Within our Methodist Church in Britain, on the whole, we have a culture of envy. There is an envy of gifts. So that when the rhetoric of collaboration is mouthed it often means ways of strapping the gifts of the high-flyer so that we bring everything down to a level of the lowest common denominator. I don't understand that to be team work or collaborative ways of working at all.

What has always delighted me about the *avec* approach is its honest recognition that a methodology devoted to non-directive ways of working has a way of coping with the fact that there are times when you have to be directive. Now to me, that is an impressive control of the whole thing because there are circumstances where someone has to take an initiative, where someone has to announce that something has been done. And non-directive work is not an excuse for dilatory and refractory ways of working. It recognises the complex ways in which people do act and live. What I have discovered in certain places is that what was expected of me was that I should do absolutely nothing without first of all consulting my colleagues. Nobody trusted me to be out on a limb, and my skills and gifts are to be out there probing and exploring and sometimes coming back with things I didn't know I was going to find. But suspicion of that is what I have discovered at times. I really do think that is a serious thing to look at, especially for the gifted person with entrepreneurial skills or the extrovert character.

Anyhow, back to the Haitian Circuit. They have had a succession of ministers and some unfortunate happenings since. A key member of the group was one of the boat people who just disappeared and ended up months later on Florida's shores. I have seen him in Florida. The lives of one or two key members of the group fell apart in ways that were very difficult for the group to handle. Some of the key actors are still there. There's a secretary and two evangelists and a couple of school teachers. There is enough of a core of what was there for the group to continue. And the Circuit's still there! But of course I do recognise that it was still rather dependent upon my successors having the same philosophy, because they were the ones who were not members of the original experiment. A lot was expected of them and I suspect it hasn't always been easy. It is a tough job and we have got to be honest in our reflections on these things. Also I suspect that when the group had me replaced by another white minister, they simply felt they could expect of him everything they had come to expect from me. Now, that white minister hadn't been on an *Avec* course. That white minister wasn't me. That white minister's only common trait with me was that he was white. But in terms of the group, I know that they made false assumptions on the basis of his being white. And when that white minister was followed by a black minister, I think the group also made some wrong assumptions: white ministers can go to the States and get money for this that and the other, black ministers can't. So they felt negative about the black minister. What would have been ideal, I think, is that at every moment of significant transition, especially the moving of a minister who is the only non-local person there, the group needed a five-day *Avec* course to help them through the transition and that wasn't available. So I think in the circumstances it's probably remarkable that so much continuity has been achieved.

Another limiting point that we must mention also is that this was a self-determined initiative and process within the Cap Haitien Circuit. It wasn't the way the whole Church worked across the Republic. The wider applicability of the method was clear to draw from what was happening in Cap Haitien. But it's a small church with few workers and times for reflection, and sharing of quality things like that are very few. So it was unlikely that people would even ask the questions. It was unlikely too that I would go to meetings where I could have shared it and found that there was time on any agenda to do the sharing. So I think that it was interesting in its own terms and for its own sake but the practical reality and the pressures under which people lived meant that it was unlikely to have the wider canvas that it deserved.

Since then I almost think the *avec* approach has gone into the bloodstream. It is a long time that I've been using this. But I have to say too that the interaction between the method and my own personality is an interesting one. There is much about me that is thrusting and spontaneous and moves instinctively into the action mode. I see things pretty quickly and I go for them. All traits of character which I think some people find threatening and intimidating. I think it could quite easily be the case that I would not be a consulting person but an action-based person making things happen, doing things rather than looking for ways of working with people to make things happen. I think that my personality and my gifts might well have led me to be that kind of a person. I really do think that the *avec* method has saved me from the worst excesses of what could have been instinctive to me. I owe a great deal to that. You'd have to ask my colleagues and those who work most closely with me

to quantify this. But I suspect that people are sometimes surprised to find that I do actually consult, and that I do actually take the other person seriously.

It all ties in closely with my beliefs. My preaching and my teaching and my Christian understandings are overwhelmingly Christocentric. Christ is at the heart of my theological understanding and reflection. So any understanding of the world, any understanding of myself in that world and any understanding of the world as being the place where God reveals himself is pretty dependent upon the picture of God I see in Christ. Now Christ for me speaks across the centuries of ways of approaching problems and issues that include, not exclude, the various participants. If there were a great word for Jesus in my vocabulary that would be the "Includer." Again and again and in terms of his action and the precepts that he teaches, Jesus is the great Includer – the arm around the shoulder; the touching of the leper; the bringing of the woman with the haemorrhage into the circle; the children at the heart of things and not on the edges, "He's too busy, no he's not too busy, bring them in"; the man born blind. He seems to see the other person, not as a problem, but as a person. There doesn't seem to be the capacity in Jesus to hang labels on people – this man is a Roman or this man is a paralytic. Jesus didn't set up an institute called Avec in the first century! But I think that his instinctive way of seeing the other person is as a fellow human being to know, and the other person as someone who needs to know that he or she is a person too. This is a Rabbi, a Guru, a man who's made an *éclat* and yet these rather marginalised people seem to have total accessibility to him and to be real human beings in his presence. Now, I find that to be the kind of mechanism at the heart of the *avec* thing too. The processes that are elaborated take each of the people in a given working situation as human beings in the fullest sense. In the case of Jesus, everything that I see in him that speaks of power is about a power given to him by the people he treats so seriously. It's not something he steamrollers over onto people. He's not a Hitler on a platform waving his fingers at people. If he has power and authority it's because the people he moves amongst give it to him, and they give it to him because they trust him. I find that so attractive and I find that that's consistent with the methodology of *avec* that sees people as participants, as human beings and as people with stories to tell. Nobody is dismissed. Everybody's contribution has to be taken seriously.

This enhances my evangelical role. At the end of the day what could be better news for the people I preach to than that they, although on the other end of my preaching, are not dwarfs being spoken to by a giant but people who can enjoy the deepest and most satisfying relationship not with me as the preacher but with the Christ whom I preach. To me that is the proclamation of Good News. "You my brother, you my sister, hear this. Open your inward ear. You are not a cowed, crunched, marginalised, unwanted, broken person. You were made in God's image. And that isn't just words, that is an experience you can know more and more if you just trust yourself to this particular direction. Let the person of Jesus grow in you and discover yourself to be the person that God wanted you to be." There is nothing more evangelical than that. There is no better news than that. And I think that it is entirely consistent with the *avec* methodology.

I couldn't put too high a value on the *avec* approach. I'm not saying that because you and I are sitting here and I want you to hear nice noises coming out of my

mouth. I have said so again and again in all the courts of the Church. But let me try and spell that out.

First of all, at the moment, there's a proper concern within our Methodist Church for what's being called Accompanied Self Appraisal for ministers. I'm so bewildered really that something had to be thought up from scratch, that ways of structuring the process of appraisal had to be built into the systems of the Church when Avec couldn't get funded all those years and was doing or could have offered to do precisely the job that's now being done in these other ways. Totally mystifying to me. And I have expressed my discontent on more than one occasion. I feel that an Avec course every ten years for a minister with a kind of little check up in between at appropriate intervals could have done everything that was required. The structures were there. Fifteen years ago, you could have got this one off the ground for the Church. In the end Avec ran into the sand and this thing is being funded, but it is imposing a burden on the Districts and Circuits. Avec could really have helped. My own self appraisal has really been done by Avec all through my ministry. I have been appraising myself over the years because of skills and tools that Avec gave me.

Now, another thing that is happening in the Church at the moment is the re-structuring of the Church. And I think that a great effort has been made to be consultative and to listen. "Co-ordinating secretaries" have been appointed and new ways of working are being established. The hope is that we shall have ways of working that really do show flexibility, capacity for consultation, lateral thinking and all the rest of it. In other words I rather hope that all this means that *avec* ways of working are going to be incorporated into the Church's life at the highest level. It remains to be seen whether that happens. But even the title "Co-ordinating Secretaries" for the key players is a helpful and hopeful sign.

So I think that at the level of the re-structuring of our Connexional life there's evidence that some methodology consistent with *avec* has been incorporated. In the Diaconal Order it's clear that that is the case because you have been a consultant to them. In terms of the self-appraisal again there is thinking which is consistent with *avec* thinking. I'd have wished that they had used Avec instead of having to invent it all *de novo*. Then again I think that the Overseas Division in its relationship with its partner churches has taken on board quite a lot of *avec* thinking. That's been a very refreshing thing.

What I want to say to the Church at this stage is that I feel that everything I've learned from Avec is precisely what the Church needs as much as anything else in terms of some of its unhealed wounds. I've already spoken about several things. The way we conducted the debate about human sexuality allowed adversarial and bi-polar approaches from people with quite different agendas to come into what, at the end of the day, could have been (and almost was) an unwholesome conflict. I just think that we need to consider different ways of looking at conflict and the resolution of conflict with which the *avec* approach would undoubtedly be able to help. It could help us on issues like sexuality, authority of the Bible, conservative evangelicals and liberals and so on. If we're not very, very careful we are going to find camps and parties and sects and splits and schisms and all the rest of it. I just feel that the skills and insights of an *avec* approach could be brought to bear upon those to avoid that harm so that people could

work honestly and openly with the material of the issues rather than in that confrontational way that drives people, in the end, to want a victory over the other side.

A good example of what I mean is the consultation we had in Nigeria between the Methodist Church there and in Britain. At the heart of that was a very moving, reconciling experience. I remember the tears many of us shed as arms were put around each other in Nigeria and the recognition that new ways had to be found to deal seriously with what had become a deep rift within the Nigerian Church and between the Churches in the two cultures. At the heart of it all was still the common sense with which I began. What was it? It was treating the other Church with the utmost seriousness, letting them tell their story and the only interruptions that one was allowed in the telling of that story were to clarify the picture. So in the end we could all say, "I see what you're talking about, I hear what you're saying." And that is the key to it and such common sense. I'm sure it was the key, we did not hurry that first phase, we took whatever time we needed to take to reach the point where we could say, "Gosh, that's how you have come to that conclusion."

You may well ask why the "common sense" approach is not used more. I think it is because it isn't the only thing that is happening. We all live in different worlds with their own rules. We're all motivated from within to succeed in the different worlds and in the eyes of people who look to us. We persuade ourselves that we haven't the time to go through all those steps and yet it's far more time consuming ultimately not to go through those steps. And I suspect that it's because there are different agenda items. People want to be promoted, they want to succeed, they want to do this, they want to do that. And that's got a logic and an impulsion about it too. Sometimes those inner drives for success and promotion and reputation, say, are at odds with these other ways of working. I've felt that as much as anybody.

Well, I've been following your questions but doing with them, George, as I've always done - just what I want to!

The easiest thing in the world with someone like you, whom I treasure as one of my closest friends, would be to sit you in my lounge like this, as we are now, and simply tell you what I think you'd like most to hear because I would like George, my friend, to feel good. Almost everything I've said about *Avec* has been precisely of that nature. All I want to say is that I haven't done and said it in order to give you the pleasure of hearing what you'd like to hear. I've said it because it's true. And because it really has radically affected the way I see my ministry and what I can contribute to the Church. It undergirds my approach to the problems I face and the pressures I work under. So if you get consequential feel-good vibrations from what I've said then that is a bonus. All I wanted to do is speak the truth.

There must be a shadow side to it I suppose, but I haven't found it. I suppose the shadow side is that one knows that one takes short cuts through so many things and that one hasn't been faithful to what one knows ought to have been the ways of working that one prizes the most. So the shadow side is that it stands in judgement over us.

Observations and Impressions

Leslie Griffiths' story demonstrates that the *avec* approach is what he claims it to be, elaborated common sense. By that, I understand that it is good sound practical, theo-

retical and theological sense. Relentlessly and graphically the interview demonstrated the truth of this. My mind and emotions reeled as I contrasted the profound importance of the approach with its neglect and the misuse of directive, bureaucratic and authoritarian ways of working. With some feeling I asked, "Why, oh why, is this approach not used more widely?"

Leslie suggested some reasons: we live in different worlds with conflicting modes of behaviour; we persuade ourselves we haven't time; inner drives for success, promotion and status take over. Here I add two more.

First, the approach is common sense but that does not mean, as some may assume, easy to practise. Sometimes it is, but at other times it taxes our intellectual, emotional and spiritual resources to the limit and beyond. After reading *Churches and Communities*, which Catherine and I wrote, someone said, "George, does this way of working have to be so difficult and demanding?" The short answer is, "Yes, because promoting human and spiritual development and well-being is difficult and demanding."

The second of my reasons relates to the nature of the activity by which this approach is promoted. Those who promote it are workers, non-directive workers. Leslie spoke of the need to be a technocrat on his return to Haiti. Working in this way is something of a back-room job. It involves working hard alongside people, with people, off-stage as it were. It is a servant or diaconal ministry not to be confused with a servile ministry. Generally speaking, ministers and priests are recruited and trained for high profile leadership roles in liturgy and church life and for a contrasting pastoral role. The stories in this book, and particularly this one, show that this diaconal/worker role is necessary and can co-exist creatively with other roles of ordained ministry. Many do not see this to be the case. Their predilection is for high profile leadership roles to which they feel called. Consequently they avoid the diaconal worker role.

This approach is as relevant to lay workers and religious as to clergy. I have concentrated on the latter because they play a key part either in introducing this approach into church life or in keeping it out. They are role models to other workers and meetings. The Methodist Diaconal Order is helping to develop this approach through aspiring to be an order of diaconal ministry in its own right which "expresses the servant ministry of Christ by the whole people of God to the world."

Apart from the diaconal ministry the church is recruiting for the high profile leadership role rather than for the reflective practitioner-worker role. Consequently its work is not adequately staffed and equipped to promote reflective communities. This seriously affects its ability to achieve its purposes.

Leslie Griffiths speaks with understandable feeling about being imprisoned by colleagues who adopt a doctrinaire approach to participation and consultation. I have seen this happen over and over again in teams where everyone has to have a say in everything that any member does or there is serious trouble. Members of such teams have said to me: "I am being paralysed." "I have lost my freedom to act in my own right and do my job." "Time in team meetings prevents me from getting on with my work." This is participation run amok. To be productive, teams and team-work must achieve twin objectives concurrently: they must enhance the ability of a group of people to work together and the ability of each to work separately; they must integrate

their efforts and differentiate their functions; they must marry collective and personal areas of freedom and accountability. Properly practised, the non-directive approach facilitates these things.

Almost unbelievable progress was made in the Cap Haitien Circuit in three years. An inescapable conclusion is that much more would have been gained had Leslie's successors continued in the tradition he established. But there weren't the conditions necessary for this to happen: trained personnel; training and consultancy facilities; collaboration between the Circuit and the Church. Over and again I have observed opportunities squandered in this way. It is heartbreaking. *The Parchmore Partnership* tells the story of what can be achieved when, through deliberate action, over a period of twenty-five years successions of lay people and ministers collaborate locally and nationally to maintain a consistent approach to church and community work in a particular situation.

Leslie Griffiths has become a statesmanlike figure in Haiti. His close friendship with President Jean-Bertrand Aristide is well known. He wrote his doctoral thesis on the Methodist Church in Haiti. He visits the country frequently. All this gives added weight to his statement that "the process I was engaged with... in the Cap Haitien circuit is precisely the process that the whole nation of Haiti needs to be engaged in as it moves from one way of running the country to another." My experience cries out that this is true. I can illustrate it simply. During the war in Rhodesia I corresponded with a fellow minister. One of the things that I said in answer to his question about what action he could take to promote development in such a terrible situation was: "Get African people of all ages working together in groups on their own and with white Rhodesians. In one sense it doesn't matter what they do. What matters is that they learn to think things through rigorously and to act upon their conclusions and learn from the outcome. The skills they acquire will be important in the future." Many years later, in 1980, immediately after the war was over, I went to the newly born Zimbabwe at the request of the Methodist Church to help it to rehabilitate its work. After working with a group of black and white Church leaders, lay and ordained, for a week on what was involved in rehabilitating the Church, they turned their attention to the way in which we had worked together. They looked critically at the approaches and methods and what would be involved in using them and concluded they were vital to building up a "thinking Church" which is precisely what they wanted. They concluded: "Adopting the approach and using the procedures used in this consultation in the Connexion could have, in Dr Mazobere's phrase, a 'ripple effect' which could engender processes of rehabilitation and reconciliation."

Oh, how I wished they'd done that group work during the war."

This story is pregnant with vital subjects: appraisal; the *avec* approach and the worker's personality; objectivity and controlled emotional involvement; importance of being able to think critically and creatively wherever one is located; using the approach with people of different cultures and academic ability.



Two:
A WAY OF LIFE
Charles New

When I interviewed Charles New, a Methodist minister, in 1994, he was coming to the end of twenty-one years of ministry on the Wirral and his time as Superintendent of the Birkenhead Circuit. He was soon to become the Superintendent of the Bramhall Circuit, Cheshire. For twelve years he had been the minister of two churches: Irby which had a middle class suburban ethos and Woodchurch on a council estate in an area of deprivation. Prior to that he had been the minister of two town churches, Moreton on the Wirral (1973 to 1982) and Swinton, Manchester (1969 to 1973).

Our first meeting was in 1971. At that time Charles was actively involved in the Alliance of Radical Methodists, which was campaigning against various forms of injustice in Church and society. He attended our first course on church and community development. During that course he got excited about the non-directive concept. I vividly remember the moment when it came alive for him. Course members were sitting in a horseshoe arrangement. I was modelling differences between directive and non-directive approaches on the blackboard. Suddenly Charles stood up, stomped towards the board and took the chalk out of my hand. He was obviously quite excited. I wondered what was going to happen. He described the differences in his own words and then said with some feeling, "Is that what you mean? If so, it is very important." Instinctively I felt he had got hold of the non-directive concept.

I didn't hear from him for six years. Then I received a position paper about his work at Moreton by way of preparation for an *Avec* consultation in which he had been asked to share by his Chairman. He had put the approach into practice and inaugurated a major church and community development programme in Moreton. Later he wrote this up for an M.Phil. thesis: *Development In Church and Community: Promoting Personal Growth Through Community Development and Curriculum Development Methods* (1987). This was the first evidence we had of our courses leading to such rigorous and effective application. Soon after this Charles became a part-time staff member and made invaluable contributions to the work of *Avec* through staff meetings and through conducting courses. Over a period of fifteen years he helped to staff twenty-eight courses and acted as a work consultant to many people.

Charles New's Reflections, January and April 1994

When I first attended an Avec course in 1971 I was two years out of college. Although college had been a useful grounding it hadn't trained me to cope with the variety of opportunities and challenges and pressures of circuit life. I was struggling with the theology of church and community, though I wouldn't have articulated it in that way I guess. The course proved to be a pivotal moment in my ministry. It introduced me to ways of thinking and of doing things that helped me make sense of my work. Looking back over 20 odd years, whilst it's difficult to be absolutely accurate, I think that the one important thing that the 1971 course did for me was to introduce me to the notion that the minister does not have to have all the answers and dreams and have all skills and to be able to put them into practice. I'm quite sure that that was the thing that really changed things for me. It was the philosophy that underpins what we call the non-directive approach. It's about releasing and channelling all the variety of skills, expertise and experience that is present within any body of people. This is the thing that continues to excite me about this approach. Where I'm working there is seldom a moment when people are given a chance to begin sharing that new things don't come out of that sharing.

Immediately after that course I began to put the new-found ideas and theories into practice in Swinton where I had been the minister for two years. It led us to a pretty thorough examination of what we were doing as a church and what the various activities were leading to. We didn't actually produce a mission statement as we would now call it. But it certainly meant that the people became much more involved in the planning and thinking in the church. Indeed for a period I went too far the other way, as people often do when introduced to this way of working. I so wanted to make sure that people participated and had their say that I took a back seat. Local people had got used to me as a fairly directive worker and then suddenly they were confronted with someone who wanted them to direct things. So there wasn't much direction and structure to the process!

I think from a personal point of view, being somebody with a fairly strong personality, some would say dominant, and indeed I can dominate, it's been very helpful to see that I can make my contribution without having to dominate. The personal growth which Avec has helped me with is to have the confidence to sit alongside rather than to have to keep calling from the front. So that's been good and I'm sure that has had an effect on the way in which I work with people and they with me.

In 1973, I became the minister of Moreton Methodist Church, Merseyside. The people were looking for somebody who would help them to develop the church's links with the local community. That was a heaven sent opportunity to practise what I had learnt from Avec about church and community development. As part of the work of the church we got involved with the three local schools. We helped a group of residents set up a community association. That spawned a community carnival annual event, which still goes on, I'm glad to say, and Moreton Care Centre which is a drop-in place for people with problems and a variety of other activities staffed by volunteers. Then, in 1982, I moved to the other side of the Wirral. I had ministerial responsibilities in two churches: Irby is in a village of about 7,000 people predominantly middle class with well established community activities which you would

expect in a village; Woodchurch is in a council estate of that name of about 11,000 people with much social deprivation.

My community involvement has been much more focussed in Woodchurch than it has in Irby. It is a small church with an elderly congregation. Early on in my ministry there was a discussion as to how we should use our resources to share the values of the Kingdom. There was a generous willingness on the part of the people of Woodchurch for me to be as involved as I thought relevant in the life of the estate. In the early days I worked with the community groups to encourage and persuade the local authority to provide the resources for a community centre, a much needed resource. That is now an established part of the estate and doing an enormously valuable job. Woodchurch was one of the centres of the drug scene when it exploded in Merseyside. I did a lot of work with some of the drugs groups which in turn took me into heavy involvement with Merseyside Drugs Council, the primary drugs agency in the area at the time. Also, I became involved with schools and have been Chair of governors of one school. That led to contact with the local authority education department and invitations to join various committees.

The impact of Avec on this community work is really the same as the impact that it has upon the local churches that I work in. I find it difficult to distinguish between my way of working with, say, a church council and with a local community association. Wherever I am working I am using whatever skills I've got to enable that particular group of people to address the issues that are before them and find ways of resourcing themselves in order that they can achieve whatever it is they are setting out to achieve. My function in all this is mainly that of an enabler, though of course I bring my own experience and my own ideas to bear and get them discussed. So my approach is the same whether it is helping people to decide what colour carpet to have or what liturgy should be performed, or what we should do about helping drug addicts in Woodchurch.

"Objectivity", I think, is one of the key things I have got from Avec. By that I mean an ability to get people to see issues and to come back to them when they have wandered off in discussion. A way of helping people to discuss something without getting too emotionally attached to the subject itself. That has helped me with my own difficulty in handling conflict. I'm not good at facing a person with an issue that needs facing and making conflict overt. As it happens, I've taken quite a large leap forward in learning to handle conflict quite recently. I'm thinking of an extremely stressful confrontation between two groups of people behaving ferociously towards each other. They were ordinary residents on the Woodchurch Council Estate who had emerged as leaders. One group were very much in favour of a drugs advisory centre being opened on the Estate and forming self-help groups of addicts because they had personal and family connections with people who needed them. The other group of people were absolutely opposed to this because they didn't want their kids to be exposed to "druggies". Each group was passionately committed to its cause. I happened to be there when this conflict led to a terrible street confrontation.

Somehow I managed to persuade the leaders of the two groups to come together in our church which was neutral ground to them. The atmosphere was charged heavily with emotion. They were shouting at each other. Neither was hearing what the

other was saying because, understandably, they were each so emotionally involved in their own point of view. I moved towards one of them very determinedly, fixed my eye upon them and shouted to be heard, "I insist you be quiet, you haven't heard what the others have said." Then I was able to back off as they were able to slow down and subside a bit. They began to step back and listen to what each other was saying. In the listening they discovered that there was a whole lot of common ground and began to see things differently.

Afterwards I was exhausted but absolutely chuffed. Chuffed because these people may never get into a church but I actually believe that some work of the Gospel happened there. It was about people being able to hold to their views in such a way as not to deny other people different views. They actually moved together as it happened and found a way of resolving their differences. Now that sounds like a rosy story, but it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes you can't get them to hear each other. But if I'd taken one side over against the other that wouldn't have lessened the conflict. It changes it, but it doesn't resolve it. The other way sometimes does. I'm not aware of it ever leaving a situation worse off than when I entered it. Perhaps I wouldn't know that anyway.

So even though I am inclined to run a mile from conflict, I choose to get involved because it is the way of the Cross although it sounds awfully pious to say it. It's believing that reconciliation is part of God's gift to us and if it's got to mean anything it's got to be worked out in practice. It's all back to my underlying theology about building kingdom values in ordinary human society. When someone gets up and makes an outrageous statement in a meeting it hurts me because it offends my idealism. I find myself saying, "I don't think this is the way we ought to be behaving. This is not true to the values of the Kingdom that we find in the New Testament." And people will say, "Ah, but it's in our nature." And I say, "Well, I know it's human nature. That's why we're trying to allow the Spirit to change our nature to allow us to live together in ways that make it unnecessary to make hurtful statements about people." As you well know it is costly in terms of being misunderstood and having to soak up a lot of aggression. So it's not an easy option, that's for sure. But sometimes it works.

Undoubtedly what I got from Avec helped me in the situation I have just described. People tell me that one of the contributions I have made to their groups is this ability to help them see the aspects and structure of a discussion and pull it into shape. Thinking back to that one particular instance it was making it absolutely clear that I valued both points of view, I wasn't taking sides. I encouraged them in the belief that they were right to be standing where they stood and to feel what they felt. As I said, to prevent it remaining a screaming match, there were moments when I had to be quite insistent that one side kept quiet so that the others could actually speak. In that way I was being highly directive. So I was in the middle of them, I was trying to care for them, I was expressing concern for them, I was showing in terms of my body language and the things I was saying that it was all right and if we stick with it together we will find a way out of it. And, indeed, we did. I was summarising the discussion they'd been having and where they'd got to and I kept referring to the points that were emerging and saying, "Do you understand that? I'm not asking you to

agree with it but did you understand?" And not allowing them to go on until they did and said they did. Those sorts of strategies.

Sometimes it is helpful to write things up on a board – but not on that occasion, it was very much a verbal-bodily engagement. I am known as the man with an easel in this circuit! I often write things on the flip charts, either in worship or in church councils. It's another way of getting people to see shapes of things.

Working with people in Woodchurch is very different from working with people on courses. The approach remains the same, but the methods change. There would be little point in me preparing a paper on an issue and circulating it for discussion in Woodchurch. Members of the church are, in the main, elderly working class pensioners, not the sort of people who are used to sitting down with a position paper and writing their comments in a column in the margin before they come and discuss it at the meeting. So the method required there is much more verbal input from me to explain what I see to be the issues and to ask, is that how they see the issues, and to get that kind of conversation going. But it's still about trying to arrive at "our" decisions rather than me telling them what they are going to do.

They can and do think for themselves. I have to be careful of course. I could assume that people are treating me and my comments with the same kind of critical respect that I would find elsewhere when, in fact, they might be deferring to me. That becomes obvious when they say, "Oh well, if you say so." I'm then able to say, "But it's not what I say that matters, it's what we say." To avoid this danger you've got to be aware of it. You've got to check back, "Is this what we've agreed?" "Is this what we want to do?" "Is it the right thing?" So I would promote reflection and get clarification.

In Woodchurch I often prepare people for meetings from the pulpit by saying, for example, "There's a Church Council meeting in a fortnight. Everybody's able to attend. And on the agenda there will be a, b or c and you might like to give a bit of thought to this and have a chat about it before you come."

And we think theologically in Woodchurch. If an issue comes up I would ask what is our Christian understanding on this? What insights do we bring to this? What values are required of us in this? And so the theology becomes part of the discussion.

Last year we were approached by the local authority. Would we provide accommodation for a youth club that was being displaced from another part of the Estate? Our church is situated right next door to sheltered accommodation flats for elderly people. One of the comments was, "Well, the people in Wesley Green won't like loads of young people around here on a Friday night." That caused me to raise questions about the nature of neighbourliness and what are our mutual responsibilities to one another. The net result of that was that all the neighbourhood was immediately circulated with a letter about what was going to happen and why and if there's any problems this was the person to see and contact. That was seen to be an act of good neighbourliness. So it is not the church deciding willy-nilly, imposing things upon its neighbourhood. But an attempt to meet a need and also to respect neighbours.

Becoming Superintendent of the Circuit in 1988 gave me new opportunities of using the community development approach. It had revolutionised my ministry. It

had proved to be relevant to four very different churches of which I had been minister and a wide range of community work. Now there was the challenge of using it in relation to the Circuit as a whole, seven different churches with four ministers. Using the approach in meetings was second nature to me. That had a good effect. It got people sharing more. What I felt was needed was a policy which would enable the Circuit to make decisions in relation to the larger context rather than immediate problems. So in 1990, the Circuit Meeting said they wanted to formulate a policy statement which would be a mission plan. This would be a yardstick by which to make judgements at all levels in meetings and between them. We said the Circuit policy must be something that enables, supports, enhances and facilitates local churches. First of all, therefore, we needed to know what local churches were about. (I am saying "we" because although I took the initiative my job was to enable us all together to work out the statement.) So we, as a Circuit, drew up a structure for a review of the things that it would be helpful for the Circuit to know about its local churches and which local churches could use to promote discussions out of which their own mission statements would emerge.

All that took a year. Constructing local church mission statements took the long autumn/early spring in each church. The Circuit then asked what it could do that would enable these mission plans to be pursued. Out of that discussion the Circuit developed its policy statement. Two immediate key issues were the financing of the Circuit which is creaking to say the least, and the best use of ministerial staff resources.

Considering the second issue led us to restructure the Circuit in two sectors: each with two ministers, one with three and the other with four churches. Both ministers were seen to be ministers in the three or four churches, each minister having primary responsibility for one or two churches and associate responsibilities in the other(s). This has the effect of encouraging the view that ministers are Circuit resources not the property of local churches, which is a bit of a crude way of putting it. That has just been implemented. Already it has enabled us as a staff to work much more closely as a team. We are now known as a "group ministry," modelled on general practitioners forming group practices. The staff are a Circuit staff. We meet weekly as a sign of our commitment to each other and as a sign to the Circuit that we are working together as co-workers. It's been tremendous. It is a significant development of the way we've been working for some time now. The work of each of us is seen to be the work of the Circuit as a whole and we support one another in that work. Staff meetings very often slip into what we would call "work consultancy mode" based on Avec work paper sessions.

All this has been helpful in terms of staff recruitment policy. So the discussion about my replacement included what we want this person to bring to the Circuit resources – adult education and local preacher training.

Another thing was that we saw the need for a representative forum which would enable the Circuit as a whole to address the issues that arise out of the churches "owning their situations." We believed that it was essential that issues were arising out of the actual situation rather than them being those that people thought were the issues. We wanted to encourage an ebb and flow between individual members, local churches and Circuit – and then, of course beyond Circuit. We hit on the idea of getting people

to congregate around a particular issue and then disband. Other groups will be formed to address other issues and then to disband. In this way the Circuit will encompass a whole lot of issues. This is very different from having, for instance, an education and youth committee that meets twice a year with a set agenda.

Now, three years later, we have a "Circuit Mission Plan." It is spelt out in a booklet, "Circuit Policy and how it is to be Implemented" and another booklet which spells out Circuit Staffing policy. It was a lot of work but I am convinced it was time well invested – but then you'd expect me to say that, I've got a vested interest! As a staff we're all very encouraged by it. It's done good things for the staff as well because it has enabled us to gel and grow together much more. One of the important things about what we did was that the discussions were started in local churches – it wasn't the Circuit out there coming down on local churches. All round the Circuit people were energised by those discussions. And each church has a mission statement now to which it can return every year to see how far it has travelled. People at Irby, for example, get excited now because they have a way of assessing things. "My goodness," they say, "We set out to do that and we've actually done it." People get encouraged. And the discussions at Circuit level have been first rate. When people leave Circuit meetings saying, "That were a really good do," then I think we've got somewhere.

But we're all at different stages of commitment. If you talk to some people in the Circuit I'm sure they'll say, "Circuit review, what's that?" "Local church mission plan, what's that?" In a sense I don't think that that matters. What matters is that they find themselves in a Christian community that's clearly going somewhere rather than just vacillating from one church council to the next.

Six years after my first course I attended an Avec consultation about regional and national work. My Chairman asked me to go because I was the District Lay Training Secretary. You and I had not been in touch at all during that period. It was interesting to see what had happened. I saw that your thinking had moved on. There was much more of a balance between non-directive and directive and a recognition of the appropriateness of the directive approach. You and Catherine Widdicombe, reckoned that, on the basis of the material that I'd produced in preparation for the consultation, the seeds of church and community development through non-directive action that had been sown during the 1971 course had taken root and were beginning to flourish. You invited me to help staff courses and two years later I became a part-time member of staff and remained one until 1992.

Often I came back home bone weary from conducting Avec courses but always excited, always challenged. There is absolutely no doubt that my own local work has been fed immeasurably by my encountering other people, examining their work with them and sharing ideas about what confronts them. On the other hand my local work enabled me to feed the courses as a local practitioner. So the one fed the other. From a professional point of view, I got ideas, insights and intellectual challenges. From a personal point of view I think I also got out of it the satisfaction of a different dimension to my ministry. There was a time when I thought perhaps my future might lie more in terms of training but it hasn't and I'm quite sure it's not meant to be. I was very, very happy to do the amount of training I did. I counted it a great privilege to have a foot in both camps for as long as I was able to. There is a very positive interaction between

working locally in depth and working at a national level in depth with select groups of people. Anybody who can engage in both – and it is difficult to sustain – is going to be enriched and their own work is going to be enhanced. This kind of interaction is an important thing to stimulate.

One of the things I feel good about is the way in which you and I have been able to use these *Avec* ways of working to help each other. They are not just methods to use with people out there; they are for us to use on our work and our problems. We seem to be able to work in a way that is very productive with an economy of time. I know that I can pick up the phone and all things being equal, we can soon get into a conversation that somehow or other gets on to our common wavelength and enables us to help each other to think through issues. And I can't see how that could have happened had we not invested time and effort into building up our working relationships over many years. In fact we have become not only soul friends but co-consultants. That is an invaluable resource. That kind of relationship is only possible if the participants in it recognize one another's integrity. That is absolutely vital. I know that however much you might want to confront me you're not trying to make up my mind for me. You're not trying to push me in a particular direction, you're trying to help me find my direction. So there is no need for me to be defensive.

I think I'm now touching on what we might call the underlying philosophy of all this. It is almost a cliché now to talk about the *avec* approach being a "way of life." But it is a good description because I see it as a way of life that is indivisible between working in the church or in the community or living as a member of my family or getting on with my mates down the road or whatever. You don't switch it on and off because it is something about where I am philosophically and theologically, and it's something about what I understand to be true humanness. I don't want to get too airy. If it is not a way of life there is something false or expedient about it. I think it is something that grows, it grows on you, it grows in you. So there must be points along that pathway of growth where it is more of a technique than it is an outworking of one's life but that is part and parcel of the growth anyway.

So if you tell me the approach is not appropriate then you're telling me that my way of living is not appropriate. I suppose it would only be inappropriate if I actually did believe that it could always work 100% and I could be 100% effective in every situation, I just don't believe that anyway. That could be interpreted as a cop-out. I don't think it is. I'm always striving to become more effective in the way in which I work with people.

So when I am going about my work I am not saying to myself, "Ah, this is a situation in which to be non-directive." I just get on and do it and bring to the situation what I've acquired in the process of equipping myself for the job. Obviously into planning and preparation come the theories that we've applied through *Avec* but I don't label them as such. An example of that is a pastoral visiting course I've just led. My preparation for that was very much in line with my preparation for an *Avec* course. But I wasn't consciously saying to myself, "I must draw upon my *avec* insights." I tend to be intuitive but I recognize the need to be organized, the two go together. I suppose that, beginning from an intuitive nature, things have come together through action and reflection, people I've met, conversations I've engaged

in, courses I've been on. All that has informed my theory as well as my practice. My theory is part of my resources. Mostly I draw upon it intuitively. But sometimes I consider things in relation to different theories.

I am committed to this approach because I am passionately convinced about the rightness of our calling as Christians to help to create the kind of human societies that reflect the values of the New Testament and particularly those of the gospels. I don't find there that we are being encouraged to lord it over others, quite the reverse. What Jesus did was to give people the freedom to come to their own conclusions. Now I might not be very good at applying that theory in practice and I know jolly well I am not, but I am still none the less utterly committed to that as being the clue to the kind of humanity that you find in Jesus and which is buried in each one of us. I really cannot think of a situation in which I have asked myself, "Is it right to be trying to promote equality here?" however far we remain from the goal.

Working alongside people means that we esteem them from the word go. It's not something that we impart, we acknowledge that it's there already. The servant God who emptied himself does that for us. To me that is the theological linchpin of all this. Our way of relating to people and working *with* rather than *for* them embodies that religious belief.

Being alongside people is one thing, what I am beginning to see as I talk is that being comfortably alongside people is another. I am comfortable sitting alongside the people in Woodchurch and I believe they are comfortable sitting alongside me. You see it's my stock, that's where I'm from. I come from a lower working class background. Not that I am now, but I can nonetheless still identify with them, you can't forget. In being comfortable there might also be an element of my knowing that I am more articulate and differently educated. I have a wider experience and I carry the authority that my job gives me. So all these things could reinforce my confidence and if I allowed them they could certainly put the people at a disadvantage.

In twelve months time I am moving to Wilmslow and the situation could be reversed. The people there will be very different – predominantly middle class with many top executives and high fliers. I could allow myself to be intimidated by them. My fear is that I will not be comfortable alongside them. And if that happens it will make it more difficult for me to do what I should be doing. One of the other things that makes me comfortable is my commitment to the values and beliefs underlying the approach that we're talking about. It's just occurred to me that the clearer I am about that, the more comfortable I shall be in September with a new group of people. That should help the people as well because they may not feel comfortable sitting alongside me!

But am I putting too much emphasis on being comfortable? God stays with us when it must be uncomfortable for him to do so. Sometimes it's jolly uncomfortable to be in his presence. Yes, that's right, we can remain there when it is uncomfortable. That's the crunch.

When I first got involved with *Avec* I was politically active through a movement known as the Alliance of Radical Methodists. I had strong political views about the structure and values of society, about where the Church ought to be playing an

influential role in development and about "the establishment" in Church and society. I seemed to drop out of all that as I got involved in Avec.

It would be difficult to identify exactly what happened. An obvious pressure is the sheer economy of time. I am pretty sure that that really was the driving force. As the demands on my doorstep increased so it was, I suppose, easier to push into the back of one's mind equally important issues on a larger front. It certainly has nothing to do with a change in either political or theological commitment; that remains the same. I often encourage people to get involved in issues, either through councillors or their MP because I believe that is the way our democracy works and we've got to have the Christian input into that process. And I suppose there was also a sense of, well, here I can see something happening and I can see some results occurring and there is a bit of return on one's effort and the emotional investment. Whereas there seemed to be little real change in the way the Church as a structure went about being the Church. Now that is a bit of a cop-out really because today they're having the South African elections. It reminds me of when I was in college thirty years ago. A few of us raised questions about apartheid and this country's and the Church's involvement in apartheid. It has taken all that time for fundamental change. Who knows what ultimate influence the more radical demonstrations and some of the direct action has had, but it kept the issue alive in Methodism and through Methodism in other parts of our country. So there is a place for it. Perhaps as we get a bit older we tend to be less impetuous and more pragmatic about things. I say it somewhat jocularly, but I think there is some truth in it as well. Others of my contemporaries have been able to remain much more active in the Alliance of Radical Methodists than I have.

The Alliance of Radical Methodists has tended to be confrontational in its approach to things whereas the *avec* approach is not. I don't find that uncomfortable, I think there are occasions when I'm prepared to confront. Both approaches have their place in the overall scheme of things as can be seen from what I have already said.

Avec was not a campaigning organization for social change in the sense that the Alliance of Radical Methodists was. Whoever chose the subtitle, "a service agency" made a good choice. In the light of my experience Avec's place has been in enabling me to be involved in the campaigning issues locally as and when appropriate in ways which have been much more effective than might otherwise have been the case.

Supposing Avec had taken up homelessness, for example, as an issue, well first of all how would it have done so? Apart from anything else Avec did not have the staff and resources to campaign on behalf of the homeless. It could have organized a course on raising people's awareness about some aspects of homelessness as it impinged upon a local community and what churches and groups might do. But if it became identified with a particular issue, a particular campaign, it seems to me it would have limited its influence upon the broad base of community development work. What it did as a service agency was to help others to work with the homeless through courses and consultancy services – a team working with homeless people in the East End of London, the Catholic Deaf Association who were dealing with some homeless people etc. And it helped churches to work at the issues on their own doorstep.

So Avec has been involved in issues of all kinds. It has been very much involved, but it hasn't been going around with a banner. (I've got nothing against people going round with banners but it's not been Avec's place to do so.) Avec's involvement has been in terms of enabling other people or churches or organizations who want to do something about an issue as it impinged upon them and their work. Avec has enabled them to do that more effectively than perhaps they might otherwise have been able to do. So it doesn't get the kudos for it in terms of political "Brownie points" but the contribution, the involvement has been there at a very profound level.

There is no way I could have become more actively involved in politics without the central plank of that involvement being constantly reminding people that what we were doing was searching for an effective way of living together and enabling individuals to grow and develop their God-given life. I never considered national politics, but there was a time when I considered local politics. I just wonder whether I would be more comfortable as the "prophet at the gate." That means you have got to be on the edge of things, I don't mean not related to and not participating in things, but you need a perspective from the edge rather than from the heart it seems in order to make the kind of comments that I would want to make in politics. So a letter to the local rag or something like that is a way of affecting things.

I don't find that in any way contradicts what I try to live and stand by in terms of what we call the *avec* approach because if that kind of statement is to be heard anyway it's got to be heard in the context of the person making it. The people that I work with know by now who I am and they know that when I sort of "sound off" it's me expressing my views on things. I'm not telling them they've got to agree with me. They know that they are free to argue and to discuss. But I have to remind myself however, that in September I move to an entirely new situation where people do not know me. And I certainly cannot operate from the 1st September according to the assumptions that I'm able to operate on after twelve years in this place. Prophetic action is not inconsistent with working with people. In fact working with people frees your prophetic voice like it frees everybody else's.

There is a place for a variety of approaches in society as a whole or even for that matter within a local community. These various approaches need to be related and for there to be movement of understanding and insight between them all. That's where I see the non-directive approach to community development as the flux that allows the movement between these different approaches and stances and positions so they don't become locked, fixed polemically. Maybe that's all too idealistic but I actually do think that there is something of the Gospel in all that.

I wish the Church as an institution would place much greater value upon churches, ministers and laity having regular access to the kind of facilities that Avec offers in terms of work consultancy. It would require a cultural shift. Economically for a start the Church would have to see Avec as a must not as an optional extra – not simply something that a minister who's got a bent that way goes off and does. I'm absolutely convinced that my colleagues in this Circuit would say the same. The effectiveness of our work as a church and a circuit would be improved enormously if it were part of

the natural life of the Circuit that from time to time and regularly they got work consultancy help. Where do you plant that seed? Things are not going to change top down, that's for sure – witness the comparative lack of support for the initiatives that we've tried in the past. So you've got to start from bottom up, I suppose, and that leads us to initial training and further training. I don't know quite frankly, I just struggle over this one. Where do we find the point of intervention in the present institution to begin to get this kind of shift that I'm looking for? That's one thing I want to say to the wider church but I don't know which part of it to say it to.

Observations and Impressions

After the interviews, Charles asked me about the kind of things emerging from the other interviews. When I mentioned one or two he said, "Goodness. Those are important. I never thought to mention them." A member of my research group said that people like Charles have "learnt the skill and forgotten the theory". There is some truth in that. Much of it had become so much second nature to him after twenty three years of practising and teaching the approach that he took it for granted. From what he said about the approach being a "way of life" it appears that theory, theology and methods have been fused within him indissolubly into a praxis nucleus. So, when I asked him if he consciously referred to basic theory and theological principles when deciding what action to take he was nonplussed. It seems that he does not. He focuses and concentrates on situations as they arise. Reflecting on this, it would seem that for Charles the basic dynamic is between situations and the way of life nucleus well-formed within him: it is not within him between his theory, theology and practice and the situation; it is not between his theory and/or his theology and/or his practice and the situation.

An ill-formed working assumption led me to question him sharply about this. The assumption was that continuous conscious interplay between theory, theology and practice should be normative and that it enhances the performance of practitioners. But that is to give it a clarity it did not have at the time. It did not seem to work like that for Charles New. To repeat myself, the interplay which normally led to action was between the way of life nucleus and situations. So far his experience has validated and modified this nucleus but not challenged it radically. Progressive development of these nuclei involves periodically scrutinising them. Exposing them to concepts and practices at variance to them is one way of engendering creative reflection.

A fuller understanding is desirable of the ways in which we and others build up the theoretical and theological bases from which we act and the ways in which we put them into practice. It helps us to develop as practitioners, to understand ourselves and others and thus to work together more effectively. Gaining such understanding is difficult. There are so many variations and permutations. Much eludes us because the processes flow into and out of our unconscious and conscious minds complexly and mysteriously. Much can be achieved through awareness and open-minded observation of the processes within oneself and others. But more research is needed.

Frequently people on courses said they wanted to work from examples to theory because they found "theory" difficult. More often than not others on the same course were happier to work from a theoretical base! For some time I felt I was failing the

first group by not working in the way most natural to them even though most of the things we did emerged from careful study of the actualities of their work and situations. I bent over backwards to accommodate them. But I began to see that I was colluding with them to their disadvantage and mine. I was helping them to do better what they could already do satisfactorily and allowing them to neglect what they were not good at. And they, like me, had to work with people who varied in their abilities to work from theory to practice and vice versa. So I actively sought opportunities to discuss with them different ways of learning through theory, practice and experience, to explore with them where they were strong and weak and to consider with them the advantages of them overcoming their weaknesses.

Three things invariably became much clearer through such discussions. First, we can all neglect improving our ability to do things we need to be able to do better when we assume, consciously or unconsciously, that the exclusive use of the methods most attractive to us is in our best interests. It may be most conducive to our temperament and inclinations, but that is another matter. Second, facing up to ways of thinking and working that have caused us problems over a long period calls for courage and emotional energy that are not always available for one reason or another. Creating or selecting the conditions when we can do this with a good chance of success is therefore very important. Failure can reinforce us in feeling, for instance, "Theoretical discussion is beyond me." Avoiding circumstances when we are likely to have yet another bad experience of a particular method is, therefore, equally important. The third thing follows. Progress is most likely to be made when ways and means of tackling our weak sides are worked out between trainees and trainers, consultants and consultants through open discussion of the issues. Collaborative learning is a way forward.

This interview demonstrates three of the attributes of the non-directive approach. First, it helps people with propensities to dominate and opportunities to do so, to deploy their self-assertive energies in ways which help people in groups, communities and churches to assert themselves in common endeavour directed at the common good. Charles New certainly had the personal characteristics – tall, patristic in appearance and with a commanding presence, the facility to get on with people, verbal fluency and confidence – and opportunities as a Superintendent minister to dominate. He chose to use his personality to other ends. Dr T. R. Batten who coined the phrase "non-directive" said that he himself needed the approach to harness his directiveness. Second, this approach, through providing opportunities for people to say what they think and feel, exposes conflicts and at the same time equips people to handle constructively what emerges. For instance, it enabled Charles New to clarify and help people to deal with searing conflict. Third, it helps people to be and work alongside each other. One of the interesting things which emerged from the interview for me was the idea of "being comfortable with people" even when there is conflict. That is a vital aspect of working with people (directively and non-directively). It is something derivative and complementary to approach, methods, skills, interpersonal behaviour. It creates a facilitating atmosphere.

This interview draws out ways in which Avec worked at the leading edge of a wide range of ecclesiastical, moral, social and theological issues with many different

practitioners from within their situations and organizations. Profound understanding of issues such as racism, clericalism and sexism, their effects and what is involved in dealing with them was gained in this way.

The circuit mission plan is a model of its kind, a mission plan rather than a statement. Two eight page booklets have sections on mission, ministry, ministers' job description, management, staffing policy and implementing the plan.



**Three:
A NON-DIRECTIVE APPROACH
TO EVANGELICAL MINISTRY
Howard Mellor**

Howard Mellor is a Methodist minister. In September 1994 he became one of the youngest Principals of Cliff College, which is situated in the heart of the Peak National Park, twelve miles from Sheffield. Since 1883, Cliff has been training people for evangelism and Christian service. Although part of the Methodist Church, students come from a wide range of denominations and from overseas as well as from Britain and Ireland. The ethos of the College is one of teaching evangelical theology, which is biblically rooted, related to contemporary life and culture and informed by personal experience. There has always been an emphasis on the "Spirit-filled life," evangelism and holiness, in both teaching and practice. As a result, vital issues facing the Church and society are constantly being addressed.

For almost twenty years now, Howard has drawn upon the insights of the non-directive approach to church and community development to further his own understanding of ministry. In 1990 he summed up much of his experience, thinking and research about this in a thesis for an M.A. in Theology in the Theology Department, Faculty of Arts, University of Durham: *A Theological Examination of the Non-Directive Approach to Church and Community Development with a Special Reference to the Nature of Evangelism*.

Howard has been a member of courses I have run, we have run courses together, he has been a colleague and I have acted as work and vocation consultant to him over the whole period that I have known him, that is, since the late 1970's. He has made significant contributions to the development of Avec and its work as an associate staff member, and, for one year in preparation for becoming the first Director of Evangelism for the Methodist Church, he was a part-time staff member.

At the time when I interviewed him in December 1993 and May 1994 he was coming to the end of a ten-year period in this appointment.

Howard is tall and distinguished. He is an attractive, quietly spoken good humoured person. He gets excited about ideas and possibilities. He relates to all kinds of people easily and naturally whatever their beliefs or theological stance. He takes things calmly. He travels with ease and packs an enormous amount into his days.

Howard Mellor's Reflections, December 1993 and May 1994

My involvement with Avec began in a curiously ad hoc way in 1977. A group of us from Croydon decided to go to a day's conference in Westminster to see what George Lovell and Catherine Widdicombe had to say about church and community development. It was obvious from the work that I'd begun to do at Addiscombe that there were some big community issues to be tackled. I felt there were some very interesting and positive ideas around in that seminar and I'd like to know more about them. So I enrolled for a ten-day course.

My introduction to Avec came at just the right time for me and for my time at Croydon, that is it was a *kairos* moment. Perhaps I had better explain one or two things about the whole situation. Rosemary and I did not want to leave Greenwich. We felt we had things to do. We didn't want to go. The Church made us go. The District Chairman felt we were becoming too settled. And we didn't want to go to Croydon, we didn't want to be in suburbia. All the things were against it. We decided to go for the minimum period, three years but we didn't tell anybody.

The house was in a mess. Rosemary was still a student at Goldsmiths. We were "innocents abroad." I was 27 when I went there and I had pastoral charge of two churches in Croydon. Addiscombe¹ had a membership of about 280 and Cherry Orchard, 400 yards away, had about 60 members. As far as we could, we treated these two churches with an even hand from the outset. We discovered that had not normally been done by our predecessors. Preference and priority had been given to Addiscombe. It wasn't that we decided to do this over against the past. We didn't understand the history and nobody told us. Actually there was a file about the history of it all but I determined not to read it until I had got to know the situation for myself. In fact I forgot about it and I didn't read it until I was preparing to go on the Avec course 15 months later.

I remember going to Cherry for the first Church Council. Before I could lead the devotions a leading member stood up and said to me, "They've sent you to close us." I said, "I don't know what you mean. Who's sent me to close you?" "The Chairman." "Oh," I said, "He's never told me anything about that. I really don't know what you mean. Please tell me." "Oh well, in that case it's all right," he said and sat down. I discovered as a result of that conversation that a few months before we arrived my predecessor had asked the Chairman of the District to chair a meeting at Cherry

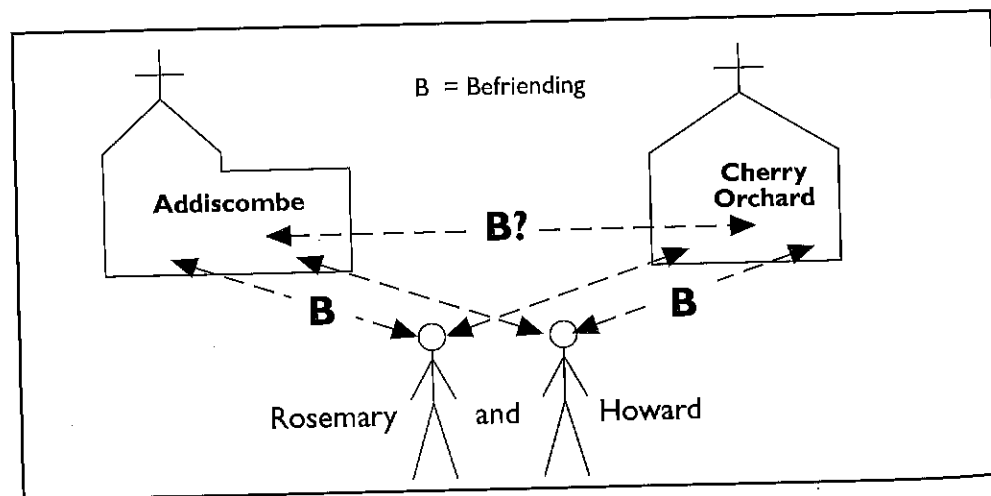
¹ Howard uses Addiscombe in two ways: to describe Addiscombe Methodist Church; and to describe the local community in which it and Cherry Orchard Road Methodist Church were set. He also uses Croydon to describe the local area.

Orchard Road to talk about the closure of Cherry. I learnt that there had been enormous bitterness in that meeting. Things were said between the people in Cherry that ought never to be said in a Christian Church. So it was into an atmosphere of mistrust and outright antagonism that we had moved.

Without knowing any of this until I stumbled on it, Rosemary had continued her practice of attending churches where I was preaching. This showed that we had committed ourselves to both churches. Rosemary's delight at meeting the people at Cherry was apparent. They were a warm, lovely bunch of people. They enjoyed having a young minister and his wife. We didn't know the significance of what we were doing until we discovered that the last time that the minister's wife had regularly attended Cherry was in the 50's when they'd had their own minister. It was our commitment that mattered rather than what we said or did. They thought of me as "their" minister rather than as Addiscombe's minister, as they had thought of my predecessors.

By following our instincts, rather than a logically worked out pattern, we discovered ourselves to be in a good position to minister to both churches. Avec helped me to build on that in ways I could not otherwise have done. Writing a work paper for the first course I found a fascinating exercise. I spent hours on it and brought it to your house at the last possible moment! I read the file from the previous ministers. From the early days Cherry was seen as a "no-hoper". It was badly treated. The idea of closing Cherry always came from external sources. Cherry was ex-Primitive Methodist and from a different circuit from Addiscombe which was ex-Wesleyan.

Reflecting on all this, I saw why ministers had wanted to unite the churches which were in one community. Why have two congregations when it would have been possible to have them together? They did not seem to meet separate needs. They were not so different in liturgy, social needs or social groupings. They had many things in common. But Cherry was against amalgamation. We decided that the thing we could do was to help the people in both churches to befriend one another. We felt that in the few years we were going to be there that was something that we could do and on which a successor could build. We knew that meant keeping an open mind about the outcome of befriending; we did not see it as a way of closing one of the churches. The following diagram expressed what we were trying to do.



Nevertheless, during the Avec course I began to see that to unite the congregations we didn't need to get rid of the buildings. Between them the churches had a lot of buildings. Some were badly used. There was a lot of community need. Facilities were required for work with young people, older people, families, young children. The social services were coming to me and asking what we could do about these needs. For instance there was a big need for a youth centre. We had premises. If, in fact, the two congregations could think about doing things together then somehow we might be able to meet some of these needs. Whilst they were against one another it wasn't possible to do that.

Somehow we got talking in both churches about "What should be the shape of Methodism in this community?" It meant discussing evangelism and responsible social action in the community, two things I try to hold together in Mission and Ministry. That kind of discussion was acceptable to both the churches because "closure" was off the agenda. I'd never used the concept with them. I'd assured the folk at Cherry on the very first meeting that that wasn't why I had been sent and that they were the body that would decide about that, no-one else could decide for them.

That January 1978 ten-day course changed a lot of things. Those first five days were like a whole disclosure to me because I saw for the first time the vital importance of working to beliefs and purposes. I also saw that working with people for development involved taking both directive and non-directive action - and that meant learning how and when to choose between them. I remember a colleague and I talking about the course on the train and then when I got home sharing it all with Rosemary. So the course just kept on going. It was like an illumination. It helped us to understand some of the things that we were doing without knowing why we were doing them. And it introduced us to ideas new to us.

By the time I went on that course I was having regular combined meetings with the six stewards at Addiscombe and the four at Cherry. (Stewards are the elected lay leaders and representatives of the congregation.) I took them into my confidence and talked with them about our ideas and vision. They liked that. It had become an important meeting in the life of the church. It was different from anything that had been experienced before.

Now, there happened to be a stewards' meeting in the middle of the Avec course. I said to them, "I want to tell you about something that is happening to me, something I've learned." I talked about working to beliefs and to overall purposes and of determining objectives which helped you to work step by step towards purposes and to put your beliefs into practice. We discussed what objectives we would need to decide on and how we'd go about determining what were our beliefs and purpose for Methodism in Addiscombe. Well, it was like lighting touch paper, the meeting was dynamic. It went on for hours, nobody wanted it to finish. The following Sunday lots of people had heard that there had been a dynamic discussion in the stewards' meeting. They were very excited and wanted to know all about it. I thought to myself, this way of working is really such a simple way and yet a preferred way of looking at things. It is quite obvious, except that you never think about it.

The thing that was dynamic about it was that people weren't just thinking about how do we meet the financial assessments and other mundane but important matters. They were thinking about what is the purpose or vision for the church, the Methodist church, in Addiscombe. It wasn't just me doing this. They were doing it. Moreover they were in touch with other people who were doing it so it was having a spawning effect around the church. The positive effect was, it made people really think about why we were there, what we were doing, what is the vision, what ought we to be doing? The negative effect was, that for some people it changed things in an undesirable way. It made things unsettled. Things weren't normal anymore.

Funnily enough, I think it was Addiscombe that found it more difficult than Cherry. And I think the reason for that was that they had always assumed that any change to the shape of Methodism in Addiscombe meant the closure of the other place and them just traipsing round to join us and we'll all be Addiscombe Methodist Church. Now all the balls were up in the air. And they were as vulnerable as Cherry folk.

Something else happened which was very difficult for me and for others. I was beginning to work more pro-actively in terms of being non-directive. People could see the difference between this and a directive approach. It inhibited or prevented them from acting directly in church councils or within the life of the church. What had normally happened was that there was a little bit of discussion and then some people had steamed in with their solution. Because it was a way out of the problem people all voted for it. Now, I tried to get all the points of view, feelings and suggestions considered equally. One woman and another man found that very difficult. She left with her husband and the other man stayed but became a bit of a thorn in my side because he wanted to operate in a different way. So you have got to bear that in mind. Now I think that the change from being directive and manipulative to being non-directive was a positive thing for the churches. But it was painful and still is when I think about it. The woman and her husband who left were significant people. It was very, very difficult.

Adopting the *avec* approach helped me to work much more systematically. Strangely that had a good effect upon my ability to work intuitively. For instance I prepared differently for meetings. One of the things that I did was to work out "facilitating structures" for conversations on problems rather than solutions for them. One of the structures I used was based on an idea you talked about on that Avec course. It was a simple device. A chart with three lines across and several down. Something like this:

Aspects	Worship	Fellowship	Mission/ Neighbourhood	Cherry/ Addiscombe	Property
Church					
Community					
Way Ahead					

At the Annual General Church Meeting I got them to talk about what had happened in the last year, what, if anything, had changed. I put them in small groups to talk about these things at both Cherry Orchard Road and then at Addiscombe. As they reported back I wrote up what they said on a huge version of this chart. At both meetings the charts were full and overflowing. No-one's voice was bigger than anyone else's. The Cherry A.G.M. came first. They said that one of their aims was "The desire to eliminate duplication." With their permission I reported that to the Addiscombe A.G.M. They responded by asking themselves, "Are we ready to give a welcome to Cherry friends?" The feelings between the two churches had changed completely. The big charts were copied on A4 paper, checked out for accuracy and discussed at the council meetings of both churches. What started as a retrospective view of the past year changed to people asking searching questions about "Where are we going?" "What are we going to do?" All the previous discussion about working to beliefs and purposes came into play. Both churches felt the ball was in their court. Oh, and it was. There was no doubt about that because I still had, at that stage, the limited vision of these two congregations working happily together, not coming together as one. It wasn't until those two AGM's that I began to see that it might be possible for the two congregations to unite in the time we were there. We couldn't have conceived of it before that time. And it was they who indicated the possibility, you see, not me.

Those AGM's happened in May 1978. In September 1978 by agreement there was a joint meeting of both church councils on neutral ground at a conference centre on a Sunday after morning services. With the stewards I worked out how to structure the day. Everybody was there. Some were known to be sceptical of this meeting and two were against any scheme which involved union. We had lunch. Then I introduced the meeting by reminding them of what emerged from the AGM's at Addiscombe and Cherry. We discussed the situation. I resisted pressure to state what I wanted and hoped for the churches. I asked them to go into four carefully chosen representative groups to discuss the situation and its implications for two hours. I remember one lady asking, "Well Howard, what do you want us to do?" And I said, "Well, that's the very question I can't answer, because I have some ideas, but this is your discussion. You're the ones that have to decide." One or two of them went reluctantly to those groups because I think they expected me to tell them what to do.

I walked in the grounds saying my prayers. I was anxious. I found that a very difficult two hours.

When they came back together it was as though each group brought pieces to the same jigsaw. The key piece was, "We should work towards a single unified society." They all agreed to that and to the other pieces which were steps towards that. It was amazing. We all found it incredible. It was a profound and moving spiritual experience to be there, to see how they brought the different parts of it to create the whole. Then they decided that we should form a united church the following Easter and at a subsequent meeting they decided to call it Christ Church and use the Addiscombe premises.

It was marvellous. We shared it with the whole church in a kind of acclamation celebration that same night. And it was then ratified. That church is still thriving.

I have one regret, that I didn't write up the experience well enough. A paper was circulated all round the church. But we didn't write up the commitments that were behind it, they were assumed. All of us were there when it happened, we all knew them. And we had the vision and that was the main thing. So we didn't write the assumptions in, and I regret that enormously because it would have helped later on when the next generation had to make decisions.

I want to say something about work paper groups. They are an incredible system. As they were started in the 70's they were a prophetic sign. They prefigure work consultancy and co-consultancy. After that course we formed our own work paper group. It used to meet in our house every six weeks or so. We worked together on each other's work right through the time that I was in Croydon. There were two ministers, a community worker and two youth officers. It was extremely valuable to us all. Working privately and confidentially on things about which we were concerned with other people, enabled us to work better with the people in the situation on the same and other things. There's no doubt about that. We were able to think things through with impunity in that confidential setting. We were able to explore things without having to be committed to them. We could run off down avenues of thought to see where they led us to. We discovered which paths were cul-de-sacs and which were actually highways. We could explore without feeling that we had to be cautious as we would have to be in meetings when people might go away saying, "The minister's got this crazy idea" or "He's trying to get us to do this or that." We could just explore all the avenues. That helped us to help others to explore them.

Then we did the same thing with the Circuit Staff Meeting. Initially it worked very well, we really did function as a work study group. It wasn't quite as good because some members of staff had not been on Avec courses. But staff changes eventually prevented us working in that way.

Work paper groups are one way of doing private work. That was a very, very helpful insight I received from my first Avec course. We talked about the complex nature of being a Circuit minister and the difference between public work and private work. Private work is thinking things through and preparing for meetings on my own and with other people in confidence. I don't think I valued that before. Preparing for meetings was something I did on the way to them - well not quite as bad as that. I did allocate time but I didn't really prepare properly for things. After that course I began to think things through. I used an old minute book and I used to write pages before every meeting to make sure that I knew what the implications were. I worked out in private the stance I was going to take in public. I worked out how to get people to think about things and to get everybody's view taken seriously. I found that particularly helpful. They are skills of a non-directive worker which Batten talks about and which we've talked about on courses.

One of the things that I learnt was all the thinking and work that had to be done to arrive at the simple statement, diagram and question that helped people to think hard. To be complex is terribly easy and doesn't take much time; to be simple requires an awful lot of work to get to the heart of things.

There is something else as well. You can learn the skills or the methods of a non-directive worker but there's more to it than that. What happened to me on that course was akin to a conversion. Some of this approach got internalised inside me. Now I do it without thinking. It has become intuitive inside me and in many ways I think I operate best intuitively. So I think of it like that, as a kind of conversion to a different way of working with people. It was a way in which I wanted to work on my ideas and theirs together so that we could find what is going to be the right way forward for us as a group of people. That was what was so helpful at Addiscombe with those two churches, with all the difficulties there had been in the past.

My next appointment was as Director of Evangelism for the Methodist Church from September 1984. It was a new post and I was given a year after leaving Christchurch to prepare myself for it. One of the ways in which I did that was to become a part-time staff member of Avec to learn anything I could about how a small organization could provide a nation-wide service. That proved to be helpful in many ways.

It helped me to build up an evangelism team which operates as a department within Cliff College which is my base. Now there are five evangelists and a part-time secretary. I work with them as a non-directive worker. They have changed from a group of people who did work without taking much responsibility for it to people who now approach things in a highly responsible way. You helped to establish that way of working, which initially was very strange to them. At an important moment you came to help us consider a mission we were going to do in Belfast. We were going into a cross-cultural experience which none of us really understood and we needed to think about how we were going to go about it. You had some experience in Belfast. But primarily for me, it was to give them an experience of someone else working in a non-directive way and to get them to see the positive benefits of that in relation to this particular task. It was a very positive experience. There were things that we learnt then which helped us in that mission. And they got to see how they themselves could think things through, take responsibility for what was going to happen, look at issues and work to a kind of vision or purpose. Now we have purpose statements to which we work.

What has been fundamental to my stance and role in the last ten years has been thinking through the connections between the non-directive approach to community development and evangelistic ministry and communication. I wanted to get people and students to think for themselves about evangelistic ministry and mission. They expected me to think for them. Traditionally Cliff conducted missions for local churches. I wanted Cliff to help people in local churches to think and work out "their" mission. That is an enormous change to make. I arranged seminars modelled on those conducted by Avec to help ministers and lay people to think through these ideas. People got very excited.

I have discovered that using the *avec* approach it is possible to get students to think openly and critically about ideas in lectures. That has been perceived by some people as operating in quite a different way. It isn't easy because most of our students don't initially see themselves as equal to the lecturers so it did cause one or two problems but we've been able to work through them.

Then I've had short courses or seminars for people to come and to think about their situation, the mission of their church, and about how they as the ministers, or lay workers or evangelists engage in ministry and mission and the stance that they take. A couple of sessions are on working with people. This brings the non-directive approach to bear upon evangelistic ministry. On the whole people light up and say, "I never thought that we'd talk about this."

Cliff is an open college. No minimum academic entry qualification is required. It is a Christian learning community. Some have an academic background but there are others with hardly any education at all and some are from overseas for whom English may not be their first language. We work with all kinds of people. One of our students this year has a history of learning problems and in anybody's book is a slow learner but she has insights about herself and other people and God that other more articulate people just don't have and that comes out.

My work here in this very mixed college community, shows that the method works with a broad band of people, but not without some difficulty. Some people who come assume that they will be taught by rote, as it were, almost as though the staff are going to pour knowledge into them and they're going to imbibe it, memorise it, regurgitate it and use it. It's normally the school leavers who want things poured into them. But most of the people here are mature students. They tend to want to participate in the discussion. At the moment we have lectures that last an hour and forty minutes and in every one of them there is teaching input, come-back, discussion and debate. That generally meets most needs but sometimes there is some friction between those who want more input and those who want more discussion.

But the greatest difficulty is to do with people who are crusading. One crusade is that everyone who is a believer should be baptized by immersion as a confessing adult. Everyone who has not been so baptised is not properly or fully a converted Christian. The difficulty is that they are unwilling to accept that anybody else has got another point of view. So they don't listen to other ideas. They don't consider them. They reject them out of hand. There isn't a dialogue. It's very difficult under those circumstances. Sometimes it's the academics, you know, that are the most difficult, the most closed because they think they've got it. And they can argue their case.

One of the things that I do early in the year to try to overcome these problems is to talk about the basic ideas of working to purpose, of enabling people to think through ideas and come to their own decisions. So I'm sharing some of the things underlying what I am doing and why I am doing it in that way and giving them aids to this way of working. Some of them latch on to it very readily, some don't. I think its going to be easier from next year. The discussions I plan to have about the nature of the community and what is involved in living and learning together will actually get at some of these underlying things at an early stage. So I will be in a position, I hope, to have that kind of discussion with the student body and the whole of the rest of the community together.

It's not enough to simply practise these things. You have to describe and discuss with people what it's all about and why you are working with them in this way. Otherwise others can abuse our way of working. I'm working in a non-directive way

and others can work against me and the work here by being directive. If we go back to the Croydon situation where, having worked with the church and brought all these people together, a person who absented themselves from the crucial discussions, later on tried to subvert the decisions by procedural motions. That didn't succeed because everybody saw what was going on. I can see parallels happening here.

Often it is on missions rather than in the classroom that progress is made. An intriguing thing about the College is that on three occasions a year we go on missions in teams. There are significant changes in the parts people play. In lectures the more articulate are the leading people. On missions the people with other skills – for instance the ability to get on with and communicate with non-Christians – who might have been in the background in the lecture room, come to the fore. In the cold reality of a mission, people are faced with real live issues and situations to which they have to react. Those situations make people think and talk together. They have to draw upon their experience and intuitions. Some do that better than others. They are honoured. They all come back from those situations feeling that mission involves thinking together in situ not just giving set answers and that there has to be some flexibility and some discipline to do that.

I've just come back from a week with the Cliff evangelists. We did a tour all round the country. In each church they describe what we are trying to do. I was delighted to hear the newest evangelist say in a broad North Country accent, "If you think that we're coming to work *for* you, well you'll be disappointed, we're coming to work *with* you. Do you see what I mean?" Now that's something that is inside him, I didn't tell him to say that. I said to him you describe how you see the relationship between Cliff and the Churches on this mission. And that is what he came out with. That is but one example of the profound effect that the approach has had upon Cliff and its mission strategy.

As the Principal of Cliff College, my aim will be to work collaboratively with the tutors but also with the rest of the staff, as I have been doing with the evangelists. There are things that we decide together; there are things we consult about but decisions are made elsewhere; and there are things that they don't decide or discuss. So salaries, or terms of employment, for instance, aren't actually decided by them as a group. I say to them, "The only things we don't discuss together are hiring, firing and salaries." Having said that the majority of things we actually decide together.

Now I want to put the approach I have been adopting as Director of Evangelism into the broader context of the college. I want to take more people into the decision making processes, including some people who are highly alienated from the decision making process at the moment. There are a lot of people in this organization – we employ forty full- and part-time staff, some of whom don't know why they are here and what it is really all about. I want to take people seriously. Staff members, whether they are tutors or cleaners, are all part of this organization called Cliff College. To make their best contributions and to get the greatest job satisfaction, they need to know what Cliff is all about, and where they fit in and what is their part in the organization. How do they contribute to its well-being and its overall purposes? What does it mean for the way in which they should be working, what they should be doing? Helping them to sort all that out takes us back to purposes and beliefs and the

kind of things we did at Addiscombe. It's getting clear the areas of freedom and responsibility and authority and maximising the participation on equal terms of people in the areas in which they should or could be involved, whatever their capacity. It's getting them to see their contribution in relation to overall purposes and fundamental beliefs.

Yesterday you and I were looking at the transitions that individuals and the College have to make over the next few months. I was reflecting overnight that this College has never ever been a static community. It is perpetually in transition. Not just because there are students coming and going, but, because by its very nature as a missionary organization, flux and movement and changes take place all the time. At all points in its history there has been a kind of purposeful movement which, I believe, is of God. What I'm talking about is getting as many as possible of those associated with the College to discern those purposes and work for them as individuals and a group.

One of the things I value is the discussions you and I have had about issues as they have emerged. Sometimes I have dropped in on you, sometimes we've had long telephone conversations. When I'd been here three months I was asked to go to a big conference on evangelism in Korea and to read a paper. It seemed at that time like the best opportunity that had ever come my way. I really wanted to go and the Principal, the Revd Dr Bill Davies, and the General Secretary of the Home Mission Division, the Revd Dr Donald English, wanted me to go. Everyone thought it would be good for my career. You and I looked at all the issues in two or three telephone conversations – an hour or more a time! Gradually but painfully I saw that the balance of advantages was in my not going. It was a hard decision. Then we had to work out how to tell my new "bosses," Bill and Donald. That was tricky, but the way I eventually did it helped them to understand how I saw my new job. Looking back I am convinced it was the right decision.

Our association has been extremely valuable at a level of thinking about work, but also at times pastorally when I've been involved in coping with things that I found very, very difficult. One occasion was when I was at a Methodist Conference in London. Over the issue of homosexuality I just felt "beached," marginalised. I happened to be staying with you at the time. I remember we sat in your back garden and I just felt I could unload to you. I remember I wept because of what I thought was happening to the Methodist Church. So at that level it was very helpful.

Up until now we have made our own arrangements to meet one another but since my appointment as Principal, the Home Mission Division has done so. In my interview for the job of Principal I talked about the kind of conversations we have had about my work, my vocation and about pastoral matters. I now describe you as my work consultant because that is in effect what you are. The Committee decided it would be a good idea for me and for Bill Davies and Donald English to have consultancy sessions with you during the year before I became Principal. That is happening. They made the arrangements for the sessions and have paid for them. And the Methodist Church only pays for things it really does believe in!

What I say in committees and various places is that every Christian minister should have the opportunity to get hold of the ideas that have been so influential to me. On two occasions in our Synod when we have been discussing probationer ministers who are not doing their work as they should, I have said, "We just can't criticise them personally. We are dealing with symptoms. The causes are to do with the way that this person is working with people. If we are really serious about caring for this person, then they need the services of Avec."

I would hope that eventually it will be possible for all people coming into Christian ministry, probably not in their training, but certainly in the first few years of their work experience to have some kind of exposure to the ideas that abound in Avec and experiences of work consultancy help. I say not their training because I don't think they'll value them enough. People need to have some experience under their belt. It's very interesting to hear people talk about the kind of minister they are going to be and then to talk to them six or eight months after they've been a minister. It's quite different. I see this in past Cliff students who've been through theological college and are now in the work. The time for the experiences I am talking about is fairly early on in their ministry, say two to four years into ministry. To be a bit more precise, a ten-day course would be the ideal introduction. It exposes people to ideas in ways in which they are able to be critical about them. They are able to see where they match their own work, and crucially, they are able to have a work paper group experience. That is very, very important.

Also I would wish lots of people to have the same work consultancy services that I have had. But there would need to be a lot more consultants to make that possible. Clearly, if it were possible to have adequate and effective work consultancies available for all people that would be a great plus in the work of the church. At first sight it would appear expensive but in the long term it would save time and breakdown. A lot of ministerial breakdown is to do with the way people work. I think it isn't too much to ask that every minister should have a work consultant. People who are going into positions like I'm going into need to be work consultants. All of us need to offer at least first-aid work consultancy help to each other. Chairmen and superintendents need to know how to work with people. Many of them seem to have little idea about how to work with people except in certain managerial pyramid styles.

At first working non-directively can be frustrating, especially when I think I know just what needs to be done. It takes time, it is deliberate, it is intuitive but it also has to be systematic and careful. It can seem to be almost ponderous. But to go blazing in, telling everybody what to do can be counter-productive in terms of getting things done and achieving things. If you're directive or authoritarian, people in the organization can ultimately undermine what's happening when they don't like it. Their views are not taken seriously so they inhibit the progress of that which is being imposed upon them. Whereas if time is taken initially – even though it's slow and it might even be tedious – people "own it" because they have a share in it. We're going through that process every year because there is a new set of students. This is going to be frustrating. But imposing things on people actually doesn't work. So the level of frustration in being directive is higher than that in being non-directive.

It seems to me it is like the Kingdom of God. It has slow growth, as is shown in the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. If you watch it, it doesn't seem to grow but ultimately there is considerable growth. The non-directive approach is a dynamic process that ultimately can have considerable effect. It did in Addiscombe. In less than two years we ended up with one church and a growing congregation working in two lots of premises. For three decades they had been trying to close a church. It was just that different way of going at it very carefully and working with people that ultimately gathered up speed in a way I don't think any of us who were involved in it could have believed to be possible.

It is extremely difficult and irksome to work in this way where people aren't willing to learn, where they're not willing to work at ideas and to think about things. There are what I would call fundamentalist evangelicals, often separatists at heart, who've got a closed box in terms of theology. They won't allow creative thinking. Liberals do the same thing when they won't allow anyone to have certainty.

To me the non-directive approach, like the Kingdom of God, is actually about interior decisions. It's got to be internalised. If it's not internalised you haven't really got hold of it. You can't make an interior decision for anybody else. The non-directive approach is about getting people to think and discuss and to act and reflect. Now it seems to me that preaching can induce the same process by communicating convictions so that people think about the issues. Even though you say things strongly and as sharply as you can, and even stridently, you're not just wanting people to accept it *per se*. You're saying, "I want you to think about these things. I want you to get hold of this." Very interestingly, I was talking to the students yesterday about this in relation to Christian conversion and Billy Graham's sermons. Very cleverly he gets people thinking through a dialogue he has with himself and the congregation as he preaches, "You say to me, 'Billy, what about...? What the Bible says is... and I believe that.'" In this way he tries to promote thousands of inner dialogues through projecting an imaginary one. A non-directive worker would be trying to set up inner dialogues in a group through direct discussion. But you can't do that with large congregations. So when you're preaching you've got to set up an internal dialogue inside people and the dialogue's got to be inside you as well. So workers and preachers are promoting inner dialogues in different ways and in different settings. That is what I call non-directive preaching. But it is possible to preach directly. If you're preaching directly you're telling people what to believe, what to think and what to do. You're not allowing for any other alternatives. You're telling them. Now I think there is a way of communicating conviction which is consistent with a non-directive approach in which evangelists share their deeply held convictions without compromise. But they also recognize the autonomy of decision-making of the congregation. It is autonomous because it is not overruled, it is facilitated.

Any preaching which is designed to circumvent thinking processes to get people to accept just what is being offered is unacceptable to me. Absolutely so. I think of that as manipulative preaching. Some authors who talk about non-manipulative preaching in relation to communicating conviction, I think are talking about the use of the non-directive approach in preaching without using the phrase.

So the non-directive approach ties up with some forms of preaching but it actually puts other forms out of order. The difficulty is in differentiating between them. I've come to think that the difference is about the intention and the orientation of the preacher. So preachers can preach in such a way that their body language, their tone of voice, as well as what is actually said is saying, "I am telling you and you're going to do it." But a developmental or a non-directive orientation actually says, "Look at this. I've discovered this. To me this is very important. What do you think about that and what are you going to do about it? I believe it is important for you to think about this, it is absolutely vital for you to come to your own decision."

There's no doubt that evangelical preaching could be seen as being about convincing, convicting, persuading, pressurising, even manipulating, through using things like music to apply emotional pressure and to generate a seductive atmosphere. It's almost putting people in a corner to get a decision. Any form of worship from any theological standpoint can be used in that kind of way. But an act of worship and a sermon can help people to make their own decisions. People criticise appeals as though they were a way of getting people to do something they really don't want to do. I think appeals can provide people with opportunities to do something that they really want and need to do but don't normally have the chance to do.

There are four things in the way in which I think things out: reason, experience, tradition and scripture. That is John Wesley's so called quadrilateral. For me, and for all evangelicals, there are some "givens" in the gospel. For instance Jesus is the centre or fulcrum or focus of human history. What people decide about him has got eternal consequences not just interesting, personal, temporary consequences. That's a given.

So, to allow reason and current experience to override what is in scripture is to do something that's very dangerous. It seems to me that reason, experience and tradition are the lenses through which we view scripture but these are not four equal parts. And scripture's a lens through which we view the others. When we override scripture, as the church has done in Christian history many times, we're stepping outside the boundaries of what God actually wants for his church and for us today. I can't impose that, but I would want to be voicing it clearly so that it is taken into account. If we ignore, neglect or override scripture we will not get the right answers. There is something in me that doesn't like that. I would like people to be free to make the decisions that they would like to make. But I'm conscious that all of us have to live within certain limits, in Church, community, and society. We can't get at the truth simply by looking inside ourselves. We have also got to look at the realities of Jesus and his Kingdom. As an evangelical and as a non-directive worker I must be enabling people in ways that they take seriously what scriptures are saying. The non-directive approach causes conflict with my beliefs if it is understood simply as getting people to think about their own thoughts. It is not at variance with what I believe if it is getting them also to think about scripture, tradition and experience and what people think about them. What the scriptures are saying may be at variance with how at that moment we feel. Then it is a challenge to us. So the dissonance between what we think and feel and what is presented is important for our development. We should not just dismiss it. We must think about it. That is where the non-directive approach is again useful. So the non-directive concept is a way of refining and informing evangelical ministry.

I don't think I can begin to calculate the profound effect the body of knowledge that is encompassed by Avec and its courses has had upon me. I think that the change it effected in the ways in which I worked with the churches at Addiscombe was crucial to everything that happened there. Without that 1978 course I would have gone in feet first, at some point following intuitions that would have got me into trouble. It has had a profound effect upon the way that I think about evangelism and was the genesis of the work that led to my M.A. thesis. The results of that research have been foundational in the way that we have approached both the teaching and the practice of evangelism at Cliff College over the last ten years. In other words, I want to say that the good practice which I now believe we have here is directly linked to the information gained on those Avec courses as far back as 1978.

Your desire to make the connections between church and community development and the biblical record was also very important to me. There needs to be more work in this area. However, I appreciated greatly your willingness and, indeed, encouragement to enable me to pursue the link between the practice of community development and the practice of evangelistic ministry.

In my judgement, and in the judgement of Rosemary, I would not have been able to undertake the job I presently do as effectively as it has been done, nor be anywhere near ready to take on the job of Principal had I not been in touch with Avec.

Observations and Impressions

There are many impressive things about Howard Mellor's story. As a young minister he led the people of two churches to form one in less than two years. This was no mean achievement when they had been resisting it stubbornly for twenty years. He has made profound use of working to purposes and belief. As the first Director of Evangelism for the Methodist Church he used the non-directive approach to get the College and local churches to change radically their orientation and approach to evangelical outreach and mission. The practice of the College doing a mission for a local church has been firmly supplanted by that of local churches being helped by the College to do their own mission. That is some achievement. It induces processes of indigenous development.

For something like seventeen years Howard has studied and researched precisely what is the place of the non-directive approach in evangelical ministry. During the early years of my work in this field these two things were assumed to be mutually contradictory. Putting them together was treated as a theological joke. Having read his proposal for his M.A. thesis on the non-directive approach and evangelism, Professor Stephen Sykes questioned Howard carefully about his intention. He suspected it was to put up the non-directive approach as an Aunt Sally to be knocked down by an exposition of the theology of evangelical ministry. That would have been entirely unacceptable. He was surprised and extremely interested to find that the intention was to demonstrate that the non-directive approach was necessary to evangelical ministry just as it was to other theological approaches to ministry. He has demonstrated this practically and theologically and, as one would expect, he has shown that the approach has a strong biblical basis.

Then he has used the growing body of knowledge about church and community development to help him to hold in creative tension his long-standing commitment to evangelical ministry and social involvement.

From September 1995, Cliff College has offered an M.A. in Evangelism through the Board of Collegiate Studies of the University of Sheffield. This, the first degree of its kind, is fully subscribed. A section of the syllabus is on the non-directive approach and community development. It teaches the action-research approaches developed by Avec. Such developments could not have been envisaged even ten years ago.



Four:
DIRECT AND NON-DIRECTIVE ACTION
Fred Graham

Fred Graham, born in Belfast, is a priest in the Church of Ireland. He was ordained in 1966 when he was thirty-one and started his ministry as a curate in a church on the Shankill Road, Belfast. For five years he was a team vicar in Birmingham. Then, after four years as the Youth Officer for the Church of Ireland, he went to Stoneyford. This parish, which he served from 1978 to 1988 during the height of the Troubles, features largely in his story.

Stoneyford Parish, a small country parish of some sixty families, is about eight miles from Belfast. It is largely made up of small farms. For many generations the community has been insular. By and large there is a good community spirit but disagreements between neighbours or families can turn into feuds which persist for years. There is a reluctance to do anything to disturb the status quo. Recently some more prosperous people have moved into the parish.

Most people in Stoneyford are Protestant, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian, with a good number of Catholics, (estimated at 30-40%). The Catholics have the same social and economic background as the Protestants. There is a good deal of work-related and friendly contact between close neighbours whatever their denomination. But they are very reluctant to meet at official church functions. The Protestants in Stoneyford form part of the Protestant "bible belt." The Orange Order plays a very important part in their lives. The vast majority of the men in the parish are members of the Order, which provides a very important social outlet for them.

But its major purpose is to maintain Protestant cohesion and resist the perceived threat posed by the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the most prominent members of the lodges tend to be very good church members and often take positions of responsibility in the church. Fred Graham's predecessor was the chaplain to the local Orange Lodge. Two special church services were held in the church every year for the Orangemen.

One of the questions that Fred Graham grappled with was: "What do you do when people will not talk with you openly about issues you consider to be of vital importance to everyone?" In this case it was ecumenical relationship and the Troubles. He had to engage in direct (not directive) action in order to stimulate non-directive discussion and action.

I first met Fred when we were invited to Ireland in 1978 to explore with people from all the denominations the relevance of the *avec* approach and the Avec courses to their situation. That led to a series of ten-day courses and seminars in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic throughout the eighties and into the nineties. Most of them were ecumenical. Fred attended the first ten-day course in Ireland. Then he attended courses in London including the two-year diploma. His dissertation for that diploma makes very interesting reading, *Ecumenical Initiatives in a Rural Parish*. Since then he has staffed many courses mostly in Ireland but a few in England. Now he is considering setting up an Avec type agency in Ireland.

Fred Graham has enormous energy and gets on with all kinds of people. He is deeply committed to his ministry and takes his work very seriously. He has a sense of vocation about introducing the *avec* approach to the Irish Churches.

Fred Graham's Reflections, January 1995

For some years before I came across Avec I had been interested and involved in group work theory and practice. I attended Training Institutes organized by the Church of England as a course member. Later in Ireland I was involved in staffing similar courses with the Extra Mural Department of Queens University Belfast. These courses were designed to help people to explore issues of authority and leadership. After a number of years I became unhappy with this approach to learning because while some people did learn a lot, many others did not.

Then I met a couple of people who'd been sponsored by Peacepoint to go on Avec courses in England. That must have been in '76. What impressed me was that they seemed to be very practicable courses and that those who had been on them had actually changed their approach to people and the ways in which they were working with them. That was what convinced me that here was something worth looking at and taking advantage of. So, on the strength of that, I gathered together people I knew who'd been on courses. They had found the same thing and their reactions were very, very positive. We set up an ad-hoc committee and arranged for Avec staff to come over to introduce themselves and their ideas through workshops in different parts of Northern Ireland. Widely representative ecumenical groups tested the *avec* approach against the Irish situation and decided that it was relevant and that they wanted to see courses in Ireland. So that's where it all started and I've been involved with Avec ever since.

I was a member of the first course in Ireland which was held in the centre of Belfast in 1979. The *avec* approach has helped me in many ways. I've always been a very reflective person, thinking about my work. The thing that Avec did was that it helped me to see my work in a more objective way: to see the whole job, where it was going and the work I was doing. I've always been a great enthusiast, I throw myself into things and would put a lot of energy into them. Before Avec I did not wrestle with questions about whether I should be doing things or other people should be doing things. My tendency was to be very directive and to get on with things. One thing I saw from the *avec* approach was that there are questions to be asked about where you put your energy. Now I use a lot of my time and energy in actually enabling other people to get engaged in work. So the non-directive approach and community development were very big things for me. They were about empowering people and that is very much in tune with what the gospel is about.

Through Avec I acquired the ability to stand back. I was encouraged to think about my work. I was given a number of very useful models and tools to help me to think, to analyse work, to see different stages of work. And it wasn't just about handling work, it was about how to work with people. I was very impressed by the ways in which Avec staff treated people with loving respect. One of the things that struck me early on was that people who said silly things were treated with as much respect as someone who made a comment full of insight. On a number of occasions, I noted that when staff members persisted with someone who was experiencing difficulty in getting their ideas across, often quite profound and useful contributions were eventually made. The ways in which the staff behaved and responded set standards which led those on courses to treat each other's comments seriously. Compared with other courses, for instance, people didn't try to undermine each other or make fun of each other. I was impressed by that. It is a very good model of how the Church can and should be. A place where people do respect each other and look for the gifts and the strengths in people rather than their weaknesses and take each other and their ideas seriously. That means helping people to identify and to face up to real issues. And that involves challenging them and questioning their ideas with them. That is very different from simply confronting them. I have been on courses where people have been attacked to no good effect. In Avec courses there was a great integrity about both looking at the task critically and treating people with loving respect. Nothing is done at the expense of the people.

The *avec* approach led me to see that you could have a very strong faith and deep commitment to serving and helping people and at the same time you could work with them in such a way that you actually were not promoting what you were trying to do. If I want people to grow strong and healthy and to take responsibility for their own lives and yet I work with them in an overly directive way I may be undermining the very thing I'm trying to bring about. So the non-directive approach and community development were very big things for me. They were about working flexibly in ways appropriate to the situations, about moving things forward creatively so that there is development in people and situations. I really warmed to the *avec* approach because it rang true to the gospel for me and was in line with what I am trying to do in my ministry. A very significant text for me is one of our Lord's sayings: "I've come that you may have life and life more abundant" (John 10.10). A lot of my sermons

would be about that kind of idea: of strengthening people; of people being forgiven and liberated; that life here is not to be endured but to be enjoyed; that people are to grow. It seems to me that *Avec* was actually encouraging those things and giving people tools to do them.

And so I moved out of "T-group" training and put my energy into learning about this *avec* approach, seriously applying it in my ministry and running courses in it for other people. Each of these constantly reinforced the other.

When I first started to put these things into practice I was the rector of Stoneyford, a rural parish on the outskirts of Belfast. It was a working class farming community. It was a mixed community of Catholics and Protestants. They were opposed politically and separated religiously but they worked together quite well on the farms and co-operated with each other. One of the things I began to do was to try to get the Select Vestry, the main church committee, to think about the parish and the idea of a very different kind of partnership and collaboration between myself and lay people which has been a dominant idea in my ministry. I wanted us to co-operate on all aspects of parish life and work. Traditionally the Select Vestry looks after the practical side of things and the clergyman is left to do everything else. So the whole mission of the church, the pastoral care, the worship, all that sort of thing is left to the clergyman. Lay people support him but it is seen to be basically his job. I'd really been questioning that. So what I wanted was a very big change. That would be the first time that they had thought about doing anything like that. My predecessor would have very few meetings and a very directive style of ministry.

I had a very happy relationship with the people. There was a lot of goodwill. So when I put up these suggestions people went along with me and tried them out although it was fairly strange for them. It worked quite well. Increasingly people took responsibility for different things in the parish. For example, when the Church was preparing for its Centenary celebrations, it was suggested that a Parish history be written. My predecessor had done one and it was assumed that I would write this one. But I felt it would be good to get parishioners to write about their history. In fact, we asked a woman parishioner, a farmer's wife, to write it. She was very popular and of good standing in the place. She was a bright and clever woman but she wasn't highly educated. She had never ever done anything like that at all. But she took responsibility for it and wrote it. I helped and encouraged her. It was published and widely circulated. She got a lot of satisfaction and pride from that.

The *Avec* course made me think about the parish in relation to the Troubles, which were at their height. Without that help I don't think I would have had the understanding or courage to take a stand. I made various judgements about what I thought we should be doing as a parish and I tried to get the parishioners to work at them. So some of the ideas and the insights I got from the *avec* approach led me down a painful road. Instead of just going with the drift, I did actually try to work with the parishioners on some of the quite painful issues that were around, for instance their attitude to the Roman Catholic Church. That caused a lot of upset in the parish but at the end of the day what happened did matter. A witness was made. Quite a number of people in the parish were encouraged by some of the discussions and the stand that I took during that time.

I made reference in my sermons to Catholics and about the attitude we should have to them. I would say that I was a member of the Church of Ireland. I was very proud of that. And that I believed that Catholics were part of the Christian Church too. They had different traditions, beliefs and emphases. But they were actually part of the Christian Church. Not many of my congregation would accept that. They believed that the Catholic Church is not part of the Christian Church - I think that is a ridiculous point of view. Several times people walked out. I followed them home afterwards and discussed the issues with them. I did lose one parishioner at this time. In this case, despite discussions together, he was unable to agree to differ with me and stay. He joined the Free Presbyterian Church.

Also, having thought out my own position carefully, I took a stand on some very controversial issues to make the parishioners make up their minds about what they thought and where they stood. As I have said, they would work together on the farms with Catholics. They'd turn up to Catholic funerals. They'd go in the house. But they wouldn't go into the church, they would stand outside it. Catholics would do the same at Protestant funerals, although a few might go into the church. I went into the services to make the point that it was quite legitimate for Protestants to go into a Catholic church and that it didn't involve compromising your own position or beliefs.

Then there were more political issues. Most of the men in the parish would have been in the Orange Order. They were all Unionist or Democratic Unionists. My political position was much more towards the Alliance, a kind of middle of the way party. But I would never have said to the people what my political position was. I wouldn't have said, "I'm an Alliance voter," even though people might have sensed that I was. I would say a lot about our Christian responsibility to accept people who differ from us, to love them, and to respect their point of view. I would have been putting that across quite strongly.

So we clashed over political issues. The local lodge of the Orange Order acquired a new banner which had a picture of the Parish Church as the main feature. They had got the use of our church hall and grounds for the dedication ceremonies associated with this flag. I was invited to attend. At that time I felt that it was critically important that I distance myself and the church from the Orange Order. The flag made it look as if we were all in this together. So I wrote to the Orange Order. Many of the members were my own parishioners who would see the church and the Order as much the same thing. I set out very carefully why I was not going. That was another way of making people think about the relationship between the church and the Order.

On another occasion someone had put up flags of a Unionist paramilitary organization on telegraph poles inside the church grounds. I went and took them down. One of the parishioners got very, very upset about that. In relation to these events several parishioners questioned what I was doing. I presented my point of view and we discussed things in a reasonable way. Some disagreed and argued with me. Several people in the Orange Order had quite lively discussions with me. Other people would have plenty to say to others but wouldn't raise the issue with me.

In the normal course of pastoral visiting the political situation would come up. Certain families would raise the issue practically every time I was there. So over the years there was a debate and discussion going on between us.

And there was a certain amount of mild intimidation. At night time people drove their cars into the Rectory drive at say two o'clock in the morning, shone their lights on the house and tooted their horns. It was not serious intimidation by Northern Ireland standards but still it wasn't very pleasant at the time. It was a very difficult time. Ministering in that situation and addressing the religious and social issues was very hard. People were so angry and so frightened about what was going on. It made it very painful and difficult to live with the issues. Despite my taking these stances and the different disagreements, I lost one person only from the parish during ten years. A lot of them did not agree with me. They were very upset by some of the things I was doing but they did accept me. The normal thing in a lot of churches was for people to walk out and go somewhere else.

Over the time that I was in Stoneyford I saw people change but I cannot prove that it was because of what I did, though I believe the approach I took did help. People weren't just doing what they were told. They weren't simply continuing the tradition. People were participating much more in thinking about the life of the parish, what it meant to be the church and what was its mission.

When I went there they saw Catholics and Nationalists as rebels with no rights. The only thing to do was to keep them out of power because you couldn't trust them. They became more open to them and began to see that they had a point of view that had to be taken seriously. Some even saw that they might have to be represented in new forms of government.

So there was a gradual transition going on. They began to look beyond their denominational context and to take seriously that we were living in a split, troubled society. It began to sink in that we had to think about that and make considered Christian responses to help turn the tide. We had some responsibility to stop "knee jerk" reactions which perpetuated the Troubles. I'm sure that did happen. I have in mind a number of people who were trying to maintain a more reasonable, liberal attitude. They were definitely supported by what happened. I can remember conversations with several people who definitely felt quite strengthened by what had been going on and that their point of view was being represented in a very difficult situation.

All I can say is that we made an attempt to get people to struggle with the issues. There were no dramatic changes in the situation as a direct consequence. People in a lot of other church situations were also doing bits like that. And I do think that one of the things to say is that, while the situation in Northern Ireland was very bad over that period, it could have been a lot worse. There are other situations in the world that have shown that. One of the many factors that prevented that, I believe, were small groups of people inside and outside the churches who were struggling with the issues and trying to do something about them just as we were.

Community development work and the *avec* approach is about actually encouraging people to talk about issues, to identify issues and discuss them, to come to decisions about them and to put them into effect. To get people thinking and acting I had to do a lot of analysing for myself. Avec helped me to do that. Sometimes I sat round a table and talked things out with the members of the Select Vestry. But I didn't say to them, "Let's talk about Catholics and Protestants and how they ought to get on with each

other and whether we ought to go into funeral services." Some churches were doing that. It wasn't happening in my church. When I think back, I don't know why I didn't attempt it. I just didn't, presumably because I felt it wasn't on. The parishioners weren't extreme Protestants, but many of them were very ultra Protestant. It was very difficult to have a reasonable conversation with them on some issues. They were very much a farming working class people. That doesn't mean to say they couldn't talk about things, they could. But they wouldn't be used to talking about those kinds of contentious issues. I don't think that was on. Maybe I'm rationalising it, I don't know.

What I did was, I got people really thinking and talking. I raised issues for discussion. I thought things out and took up a stance. I made a stand on various contentious issues to make people think. I would call doing this prophetic action. Some of the discussion was in groups but most of it wasn't in tidy groups. It was here and there in all kinds of situations with ones and twos. It was informal and ad-hoc. It was a messy process. But perhaps we got further that way. It was safer for everyone than formal meetings. What mattered was that there were serious conversations about vital issues which were divisive. The dialogue was not divisive and it didn't issue in violence I believe because of the approach I adopted – it was forthright but non-directive.

During the last phase of my ministry in Stoneyford I did the *Avec/Roehampton* diploma in church and community development. Ten years ministry in Stoneyford was the subject of my dissertation. I have never reflected so deeply over a period of two years on such a long phase of my ministry. It was a good time to do it. Several important things came out which have influenced what I have done since.

It was only when I reflected on my time in Stoneyford that I really understood what I had been doing. All along I had been thinking hard and making conscious decisions and acting upon them. But a lot of what I did was intuitive really. I began to see how things were all linked up together. I started to understand what the word systemic meant in relation to my work. I learnt that if you worked at the part in relation to the whole then you could in fact affect the whole. That was very encouraging because one of my temptations is to try and push forward on every front at the same time. Whereas if you do quality work in one particular key area that might affect the whole.

One thing sticks in my mind from the diploma studies. I led a seminar on an American community study, *Small Town In Mass Society*. There were three or four key players in the town who made the most important decisions about the community and one person who was the ultimate authority in the situation. That was a total revelation to me because it led me to see my parish in a new light. Suddenly this figure emerged out of the parish. He had a similar kind of role, he was a dominant key figure. That was a mind-blowing insight.

As I reflected, I became aware that somewhere I'd picked up an assumption that if I could get my technique right I could engage with people in the right kind of way and there would be nice tidy development taking place. What in fact had hit me during the course was that a lot of real development is extremely messy and very disturbing, upsetting and confusing. That's how it was in Stoneyford. You analyse the situation,

decide what to do, try to do what you can with people. At the end of the day you are never sure how much ground you have made but at least you have done what you thought was right and you hope that something good would come out of it.

Another thing that came to me from the diploma experience was a lot more confidence about my understanding of situations. I feel when I make responses I am not just making a shot in the dark. I have a fairly good idea this is the right kind of thing to be doing or certainly a thing worth exploring and testing. Over the years my confidence in analysing my work situation and in making appropriate responses has really been quite deeply refined and has moved on.

From Stoneyford I moved to Buncrana, Co. Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. I was there for three years and had pastoral charge of two parishes. The parishioners were a very, very small group of Protestants in a large Catholic community. I saw very quickly that all their effort was going into survival and not development. Also I saw that each of the two parishes was so concerned about their own future that they wouldn't work together in case their co-operation was used as a reason to merge them. Now those are the kinds of insights that seem obvious enough now but I think they are things that came from my training and the discipline of working on Avec courses. My predecessor had been very directive, they very seldom had meetings. But because of my experience at Stoneyford and what I had seen through reflecting upon it for the diploma, I was able to move much more quickly in getting people to discuss the broader issues and make decisions together. I did this in a number of ways. I got agreement to the setting up of an education committee with representatives of both churches in the joint parishes to discuss things such as worship, Lenten groups, Sunday schools etc. I called regular meetings of the Select Vestry. I introduced parish study groups and the holding of joint family services alternatively in the two churches.

The same thing happened when, in 1992, I came into this rural parish, Donemana in Co. Tyrone. There were two sides to what I did. I preached about my understanding of the church: the kind of partnership I believed there should be between clergy and laity and how they should be jointly responsible for all the work and ministry of the church. Also I was teaching about it and pursuing it in all kinds of discussions in the parish. The other side was to help the parishioners think about developing a corporate approach to ministry and to decide on appropriate structures. After some hesitation they agreed to set up a pastoral council. However, over a period of two years' opposition to the pastoral council grew, chiefly because it was thought that the authority of the Select Vestry was being undermined. After further discussion it was agreed that the Select Vestry with some modifications would carry out the functions of the pastoral council. This has entailed more frequent meetings of the Select Vestry and a more wide ranging agenda.

Unless there are formal arrangements for lay people and the clergy to discuss and decide about things, the clergyman is left to implement things. That was the old structure: the Select Vestry looks after the practical side of things and the clergyman is left to do everything else. You need to institutionalise change so that you have creative structures which enable people together to work continually at things, to respond and then to learn from their experiences. I was quite determined when I

came into this parish that I would have such a structure: there is no way in which we could have the kind of parish that I wanted unless we had a structure where we could be thinking and working together. So I have taken quite a strong line on that. That is the thing that I have fought for. Now I think we have got there and hopefully we will build on that. But it has taken three years to get a real commitment to work together and agreement about the machinery, the kind of parish council, which will enable us to do so.

So I took up a position: if we are going to be a church, as I understand it, where everyone is able to exercise a ministry, their ministry, and we are all able to work together, then it is absolutely vital that we have some kind of structure where we can do that and become that kind of church. I presented this idea to them and I discussed it with them. I haven't imposed it on them. Initially they acquiesced to the idea of a council but it was quite obvious that they had not committed themselves to it. I think I probably went too fast at that point but whenever it became obvious that people had major reservations I made sure they were fully explored until everyone was satisfied. In that sense I was non-directive. It's now accepted that we will work together and, after the initial false start with the pastoral council, we have a structure we can work with. I think it is very important that clergy do give a lead by raising in forthright ways issues that they think people need to think about.

One of the main benefits I have got from Avec courses is that my energy is much more focussed and channelled. I do think about what I'm doing. I try to learn from what I do. I do respect other people's points of view and try not to impose my own. I listen to what other people have got to say. I take other people's ideas seriously. I take my own ideas seriously and try to get others to do so. But, if I take up a position or suggest some initiative and other people come forward with alternative ideas or reservations, I would be very quick to change or modify things if I thought I had been shown to be wrong. Consequently, I believe the kind of interventions and initiatives that I now take work more often than not.

So far I have been talking about how useful I have found the *avec* ideas and approaches in my own situations. I have also used them extensively in various versions of the ten-day courses and work paper sessions. That has been very valuable. People have got hold of the concepts and ideas and some of the skills. Now we are setting up in Ireland "A Service Agency for Consultation and Training in the Churches" based on the Avec model. We are calling it "ACT." Such an agency is urgently needed here. One of the things I've appreciated very much about the Avec experience is that it has been ecumenical. In the Irish situation that has been and still is particularly important. Relationships I and others have made with people from different denominations here in Ireland have continued throughout my ministry and there have been a lot of spin-offs. These people are, for instance, helping in setting up the ACT agency. We could have developed this within the Church of Ireland but it will be much more worthwhile if it is an ecumenical venture.

When you study each other's work situations in depth in ecumenical groups, important things happen in addition to what each person gets in relation to her/his own situation. You see that a lot of the basic issues which people in other denominations are struggling with are the same as the ones you are struggling with. You see

that the sense of vocation can be as strong and as good in a Catholic as in a Protestant. Personally I have found the level of commitment in some Religious Sisters quite moving. When you are working with your own people you are inclined to make assumptions. When you are with people from other denominations you have to explain yourself and they have to do the same.

So you see your own situation more clearly and reconsider your assumptions and other people do the same. That means everyone learns about each other's work and their own at the same time. Also when you are looking at, say, a Roman Catholic priest's parish situation you often see your own situation in a new way so that people do think more creatively about what they are doing. Studying work situations in depth like this brings people together in ways that general conversation or shared worship do not. That is my experience anyhow. That kind of ecumenical bonding in Ireland is very, very important.

Simply getting clergy to think can be a big step. Some time ago I was working with a group of curates. Suddenly I realised that I had been assuming that they think about what they do. It was obvious that they didn't. A lot of what they do is done out of habit. They didn't reflect on what they do. People who have been on Avec type work consultancy courses do actually think much more critically about what they are doing and how they are going about what they are doing. And they start to get people in their churches thinking. This changes them from being directive – and a lot of clergy are very directive – to being non-directive. That is an important modifying influence. I've talked to a lot of people who have been on courses. Most of them tell me that they've tried out different things since the course and that their practice has really changed. Certainly they are questioning a lot of things and the ways they've done them in the past and asking questions about more appropriate ways of doing them.

Then there is my involvement with the bishop. Since coming to the Diocese in 1989 I had been asked by the bishop to take responsibility for in-service training of clergy and also to co-ordinate the programme of renewal in the Diocese. This role of co-ordinator has involved me in close collaboration with the bishop in planning and implementing various initiatives. Once again my experience with Avec has been invaluable. Under the bishop's direction I helped Diocesan Boards to review their work and move from an ad-hoc approach to their responsibilities to a more proactive approach based on a better understanding of their role. This was done by inviting the Boards to think through a series of questions exploring their role and function and in one case actually facilitating such a discussion myself. As a member of the Diocesan Development Board for a number of years I also encouraged reflective thinking about various aspects of the Church's mission through preparing position papers and offering resource material.

My life has really been quite radically changed, it really has, through my experience and involvement in Avec. I have grown and my own life has become more abundant to me through it. I love my work, my parish ministry, my involvement with the Diocese and the challenge of setting up this new training agency. A lot of the skills, the insights and the confidence that make all that possible have come out of Avec, there's no question about that.

Of themselves these are reasons enough for my commitment to the *avec* approach. But when I think of the Church at large I see the enormous need for this approach. I just don't think the Church can be the Church as the body of Christ without it. A lot of gifts are not being released at the moment because for the most part we are working with people in inappropriate ways. While those ways were appropriate and acceptable fifty years ago, they are certainly not so today. People want opportunities to exercise ministry and to use their gifts and we have to find ways of helping them to do that. I feel that quite strongly. Even when the Church decides that it wants to work with people in a collaborative rather than a directive way, clergy and laity don't often have the experience and the skills to do that. The *avec* approach, church and community development and the courses we run put forward ideas about working in partnership with people and give a lot of tools for working in that kind of way. I think the Church has an enormous need for those tools.

I learnt and used those skills during the Troubles. I feel very positive about what I was able to do, I think it was time well spent. But how I wish that twenty years ago I had had the insights and skills that I now have. I think I would have made more impact. I don't say I wouldn't have made mistakes but I think I would have been more creative. That would be my regret. But now we need all that the *avec* approach has to offer and all I have learned as we move forward from the ceasefire to build a permanent peace and new communities.

Observations and Impressions

Getting people discussing things constructively and creatively is an endlessly fascinating and demanding experience. Occasionally groups do so in a tidy manner, economical in time, words and energy, generally when they have skilled help. Fred Graham gives a refreshingly different perspective by showing that sometimes people discuss things only when they are galvanised by dramatic events which shock them into speech. What happens then is messy, emotionally fraught, ad-hoc and fragmented because it takes place in community where people meet casually and formally in many different settings and through grape-vine communications which flow in all directions at the same time. The grape-vines carry all kinds of information, gossip, distortions and innuendoes. Given the nature of these communications the interaction cannot be collated or controlled. Any intervention is a hostage to fortune. Misunderstanding and conflict are never far-away. This puts paid to any notion that church and community development is only about working in formal groups. Development, or lack of it, depends to a large extent on the nature of the community-wide communications. Fred Graham gives us a glimpse into working in, with and through the Stoneyford Protestant community at the height of the Troubles.

Also, he gives us insights into the enormous difficulties of getting people with closed minds to re-think ideas to which they are deeply committed and which they guard ferociously because they believe they are fundamental articles of faith. His approach had several aspects: he used the *avec* approach to analyse the situation, to think out his own position and to decide what action to take; he preached and taught about his beliefs; he used organized meetings and instituted councils for wide ranging formal discussions; he pursued the discussions into the community, taking

and making opportunities to talk face to face with people on their own ground and on their terms.

Another aspect of his approach was very important. Quite deliberately he kick-started their thinking by public, provocative and offensive acts: pulling down flags and entering a Catholic Church. These actions caused pain but they generated heated discussion which eventually led to change in attitude and approach. An effective combination: direct not directive action followed by non-directive verbal exchanges. Fred found himself wondering whether he could have got the same end result through off-stage discussions stimulated by challenging questions. I do not know. Perhaps the only way to get people to break out of closed circuit thinking is through some form of extraordinary verbal or non-verbal action which brings people up with a start. The phenomenon he was up against has been described as "group-think," a process which locks people into closed systems of thought and action through various internal pressures and devices designed to make those involved conform rigidly and totally to the group norms.

The point I wish to make here is that getting people to think about your own ideas is as much a part of a non-directive approach as is getting people to think about their own ideas. Sometimes it is more vital to their development. Imposing your ideas is not. So presenting them forthrightly and even dramatically for consideration is entirely acceptable. Being non-directive does not mean hiding your own views or pretending you don't have any. The art is to so present them that they can be heard and handled critically and constructively by the people who need to be able to do so. This is not to be confused with simply "speaking your mind" or "getting things off your chest." That can do more harm than good. Challenging and disturbing ideas need to be put as clearly, elegantly, humanely and sensitively as possible but forcibly enough to achieve the purpose. In this case Fred Graham had to get parishioners to think again by thinking about his ideas but in such ways that they came to their own decisions. Imposition has no part in such processes.

It is interesting to see that he was much more sure-footed in Buncrana and Donemana, although, even then, it was not plain sailing in getting an agreed basis for thinking together and in one case it took three years to get commitment to a parish council.

Chapter Three

WORKING WITH PEOPLE IN PARISHES IN AREAS OF DEPRIVATION

Those who tell their stories in this chapter learnt about the *avec* approach through experiencing and studying it in formal study groups in something of an academic setting. Yet they found that they could use it to good effect to work with people in areas of deprivation who are not used to studying and are often treated as though they cannot think for themselves and act for the common good. Such attitudes form a subtle part of their psychological and spiritual deprivation. What is nearer to the truth is that all too many workers do things for these people either because they do not know how to do things *with* them and how to get them to think for themselves, or because it is too much trouble to do so. These stories show just how a woman religious, two priests and a minister got ordinary people in urban priority areas in Bristol, Bury St Edmunds and an unnamed city to use their minds to improve their common lot. Bubbling through the stories is the joy of people finding new life, dignity and hope.



One:
MASKS OFF
Joanna Brennan

Joanna Brennan is a religious sister, a member of the order known as The Sisters of Charity. She is now in her late 40's. Since 1985 she has been a parish sister in the Roman Catholic Parish of Christ the King which is set in Knowle West, a working class housing estate on a hill three miles from Bristol centre. Knowle West was built in 1935 as a slum clearance estate with a definite but unacknowledged policy of "dumping problem families". It has a population of 22,600, poor and costly public transport, large-scale unemployment and a ghetto mentality with a suspicion of outsiders, especially middle class and professional ones. Child mortality is high; health care is poor (no doctors are resident on the estate); solvent, alcohol and drug abuse are prevalent

and public; vandalism is an increasingly grave problem; violence against children and women is hidden but prevalent; groups of young people intimidate many local people; and there are some family feuds. The experience of deprivation is exacerbated because Knowle West is surrounded by, but cut off from "success city", Bristol. However, Joanna Brennan and the parish priest Richard McKay, say that most people are "warm, supportive, open and straight, resourceful, survivors with extraordinary strength and a genuine sense of identity and community as Knowle Westers. They are beginning to refuse to be 'put down' by others, especially the powerful."

It was early in 1989 that I first met Joanna to consider whether an Avec/Roehampton Institute two-year diploma would meet her needs. Traditionally as a parish sister she was expected to take a leading role by doing things for people but she wanted to be a development worker which she saw to be her apostolate. To do this she felt she needed to do some studies but she had grave doubts about her ability to pursue an academic course. Joanna and I both felt that the diploma course would help her with her work and would give her confidence to study. She was offered a place which she took up.

That summer she attended a six-day preparatory course during which she and other diploma participants presented and studied papers on their work situations. Then she attended and completed the two-year part-time diploma course as did her colleague, the parish priest, The Revd Richard McKay. As part of this course she wrote essays, seminar papers and a dissertation, *An Exploration of the Ministry of Parish Sisters and Their Development Role in the Local Church and the Wider Community*.

Joanna Brennan speaks in the gentle winsome way characteristic of someone from a rural community in Southern Ireland. Talking and working with her is rewarding and satisfying because she comes out from her quiet and reserved personality to meet and engage with you sincerely. She has a strong spiritual core and the capacity for righteous anger. She cares deeply about people and especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. She has an unusual capacity for examining feelings and discussing them openly, constructively and with profound insights.

In 1993 Joanna contracted a rare condition known as "mixed connective tissue disease". This distressing and debilitating illness drains her energy and causes great and continuous pain. She has recovered from some of the worst effects but can still only do very little work. We met for lunch with Richard at the Presbytery, then after lunch she had to rest to gather sufficient energy for the interview. During the interview I was concerned not to overtire her. Well into the interview I suggested we drew it to a conclusion. "No," she said, "I actually feel energised." We continued for an hour and some of the best material emerged. That is Joanna.

Joanna Brennan's Reflections, April 1994

I wanted to do the Avec/Roehampton Institute diploma for several reasons. I wanted to develop some skills for my work. I wanted to develop as a person. I needed some new ideas, some input and challenge and some help with my vision, I had made up my mind that I would go on the course even though I was going into something I didn't quite know. I found it an enriching experience.

From childhood, I had always thought that I was a poor achiever and that other people were much better than I was. One of the things that I talked to you about when I first visited you was, would I be able to do the essays? You asked me about difficulties I'd had in writing essays. Then you asked me whether I wanted to write about my work as that was half the battle. I realised that I really did want to write about my work and I said so. I wondered if I would be able to do the academic side of the diploma. Just keeping up the standard and getting the diploma did a lot for my own self image. I was able to do it! I am able to achieve something academically!

It helped me to be more reflective on my work. It showed me the importance of not allowing people to push me into making decisions for them. It certainly showed me the importance of working *with* people and building people up and letting people build me up. Also it helped me to reflect theologically on what I was doing, which I had never done before; to tie my work up with my beliefs and to see in my work theological concepts. I had not done that before. And I actually find it helpful today.

What I found most difficult was the first time the group looked at my work on the six-day introductory course. I didn't understand what it was about or the methods. I felt that what I was doing was being criticised. I found that very hard. I don't think I was ready for it at the time. I remember withholding information and thinking, "I'm not going to tell you about that, you're not probing me there." I didn't see that it was an attempt at sharing and studying, not judging. I hadn't experienced anything like that before. Once I understood that, the course was very helpful. The reading, the written work and the action-research on my situation all helped my own development and made me reflect on my work and to see it in a bigger context. It was a different kind of experience from anything that I'd had before - things like seminars and meeting people from other churches and listening to their stories which, I was surprised to find, related to my experience.

I had tried to do a diploma before and given up. One thing that made it possible for me to do the Avec diploma was the affirmation that I received from Sister Margaret O'Connor (I did most of my tutorials with her) and from the way you affirmed me without saying very much, George, at that first interview. I felt quite safe and quite reassured. One of the things you said to me was that I wouldn't be accepted on the course if it was felt that I wasn't ready for it. I believed that.

Since I did the course I would be less inclined to do things for people. I'll just give you a little example. It's a tradition in our church to have the Stations of the Cross during Lent and on Good Friday. We ask parishioners to lead these devotions and to make up their own meditation. People used to say, "I'll do it if you'll write out the meditation for me." For the first few years I used to do that. After the course I said, "Let's do it together." They would put in a bit, and we would construct prayer sentences together rather than me doing it for them. That's a step towards them doing it themselves. One lady that I saw only yesterday, she is going through a bad time at the moment, said to me, "What keeps me going and forms the background for my prayer is that meditation on the Cross that we did together three years ago."

There's a lot of deprivation and a lot of poverty in our area. We always have difficulty in getting ordinary people to take any kind of leading role. They are happy to

do the flowers, to do the scrubbing and the cleaning but not taking charge. But they resent people who are more capable coming in from outside doing things they feel unable to do. Sometimes they feel oppressed by those capable people – they're better off, better educated, very confident. They feel they would never be able to do it as well, and that depresses them. So although the Knowle West people won't take a leading role they feel oppressed by the others doing so.

The methods used on the course have helped me to do something about that. I have done a lot by just listening to them saying what they feel. And then by responding by saying something like, "Just because you didn't have the same educational opportunities as so and so doesn't mean that you are not able to do what she is doing, let's do it together." Sometimes they take up the offer, not always. Then very often, and after a little while they do it themselves. They wouldn't break out of the circle if I didn't do it with them. I think it is affirming them like Margaret did with me, saying, "You are able to do it." And it is believing in them, not just saying you believe in them, but really believing that they are able to do it and that it is important for them to do so. If I let those capable people do it and leave all our people to do the cleaning and the scrubbing, then the resentment is still there. And that is a hindrance to their development. It's believing that they have potential and getting them to draw on it.

We are talking about very ordinary working class people. They would probably have left school maybe at thirteen years of age. Most of them will be people who have reared families, middle aged people, most of them would be women, intelligent with a lot of life experience but with a very poor self image.

It doesn't always work. A group of mothers I worked with didn't really take off. Parish sisters had always been in charge. When I came I wanted to shift that and let one of the mothers be in charge but it was always, "Sister did all that." It was very difficult to break through that tradition. Eventually they accepted the idea that they should run the group themselves. But they didn't really co-operate with each other. So it didn't go on. But it didn't fizzle out. It came to a final end in this way: we all met together and we discussed and struggled with what was going on and our feelings before we were forced to the decision that we wouldn't continue the group. What was important is that we did come together and we struggled with things even though it was painful. We didn't let things drift which is what normally happens. I learnt about the need to struggle like that from the diploma course. That's what made the course work and made it useful, tutors and students on a number of occasions staying with something and really struggling with it. One example of this that comes to mind is the time we were trying to work out the theology of power, do you remember that? Students and tutors struggled together. Nobody had *the* answers. What I learnt from that was that the tutors who were supposed to have had the answers were prepared to say that they hadn't got the answers and somehow we needed to find them together. And we did. I think that can be worked out within the church. The powers-that-be maybe don't have the answers, they need to struggle with the poor people, working class women and men, in order to find the answers.

Another group that we started was very successful. I saw the need for a club because we have a lot of lonely elderly people. It began like this: I said to a few elderly people,

"What about us starting a club?" We had an initial meeting. We threw it open to anyone. About sixteen people came. I led it and I asked people for ideas for this club, which they gave. Then I said, "Who's going to lead it or who's going to take responsibility for it?" "You," they said. I said, "What about two or three of you doing so? I'll also be part of the committee to get it off the ground." And that is what happened. I was on the committee for about two years and then I came off it and it's running. It's marvellous. They have taken full responsibility for it. They are ordinary people in their seventies used to having things done for them. They would never have been in any kind of leadership roles.

Where this approach did work the people really grew and took responsibility. I know there have been changes from comments they make, something like, "It has changed my life." The same lady I was talking to the other day said, "I have now something to give." And they look different. There is a lightness about them. The weight of the world seems to be lifted from their shoulders. They stand a bit taller, and look more pleasant, more light in their faces and their eyes. And they celebrate! The club I mentioned celebrates quite a lot, which they never did before. They have parties, go out to a pub and have a meal together. They have begun to celebrate their own lives and birthdays. They do things for other people. It is limited because they are all quite elderly. They are now welcoming to new members. At one stage it was a club of little cliques. That seems to have broken down. If they meet an older person they will tell them about the club and they will arrange for them to be picked up. They raise a little money now and then for a charity. All that is important.

One of the things I did about two years ago, was to get a group of people together that would be interested in doing some bereavement work. Now the way I went about it was this. I thought of people that I felt had a feeling for people who were grieving. I approached them individually and said to them that there were people in the parish and on the estate who were grieving. They need people to listen to them. I told them I was thinking of arranging for Cruse (a Bereavement Care Organization for the Widowed and their Children) to come and do some work with a few of us interested in helping bereaved people. I asked them, "Would you be willing to come along and take part in that course?" They asked me a few questions such as, "Do you think I'd be able to do it?" "What sort of time commitment would there be?" "Would there be money involved, would we have to pay?" (They don't have any money.) "Where would it be held?" "Who else would be at it?" That was important, it was about whether they were going to be threatened by somebody else who knew a bit more than they did. That was a bit of my own feeling going on the course.

I responded differently to different people. To one person who said, "Will I be able to do it?" I would say, "Of course you can. I wouldn't ask you if I felt you were not able to do it." To another I might say, "Come and try, come and see and I'll support you all the way. Don't just turn the opportunity down without giving it a try." Very often my first response was, "Why do you say that?" What they usually said was, "Well I never did it before, there are so many more people much more capable than me. I'm not good at reading. Will I have any reading to do? Will I have writing to do?" I took these fears seriously. I told them that there might be some reading. I would ask them, "Why do you think that you are not able to cope with reading?" If

there were newspapers in the house I would say, "You know, somebody reads here because you have newspapers." There would be very few books in the homes of the people here. And I would probably say to them as well, "The other people that are on the course will be the same as you." When I do anything with a group of people from Knowle West it would be Knowle West people only; I wouldn't have anybody else. These discussions may last half an hour one day. As I was coming away I would say, "Think about it and we'll talk about it on Thursday or whenever." Then, three or four days later we would have another discussion. Following that they very often would say that having thought about it that they'd give it a try.

Sometimes during those interviews they would come up with something that happened to them in their lives and share something, maybe of their marriage. You know, some reasons why they said they weren't able to do these things. Discussing that would give rise to something else and they would share that. It needs a lot of time because you have to go back if something surfaces and listen to that and work through that. Very often when working with them, you have to put them into pairs in order to do something.

Fourteen people came to that weekend course run by Cruse, paid for by the parish. That was quite a good response. They're now helping the bereaved. They still felt a little bit hesitant going in to visit somebody on their own so then you have to match two people together and say, "Will two of you go?" But it works and people grow, and after a little bit of time they will have the confidence to do the visits separately. It is all about building up people's confidence and believing in them.

Different things are happening through all these discussions and this work. People are beginning to feel valued. I think maybe for the first time, they are beginning to think that there is something they can do besides doing the flowers. I think they are beginning to look at what they can offer. They have certainly created a very life-giving relationship between them and me and a trust.

I don't have a difficulty with this kind of work, but I do see some could find it difficult. For sure, sometimes it is much easier to ask the people who are more capable that won't have all these things to work through, or at least won't allow it to surface. When I work with a group of Knowle West people I just come to life. They can be "right crooks" but there is an honesty to them. They are open and there is sincerity about them. They don't put masks on and I don't have to put on a mask either. I can just be myself with them. Sometimes I put on a mask with the people that come in from outside because I feel that they too are wearing masks; they are not open nor true to themselves. I didn't put a mask on with the people on the course because I felt that they were open and honest. One of the things that is important to me from that course and again it is coming from my own background, some of the baggage I suppose I carry. It really did me good to see the people that I saw as academics struggling and having difficulty in writing. To see that it didn't just come easy to them just because they had been to University or whatever, helped me.

What I would like to say here to our own church, to Christ the King, is, "Look at the people on the estate. Look at their experiences and look at their role within the church. And then look at the better-off people who come in from outside the estate.

Look at their experiences and look at their role within our church, Christ the King. Ask how can we help the ordinary people from Knowle West to take more leadership roles and how can we perhaps get the others to take more of a back seat and do more of the nitty-gritty. How can we switch the roles?" At the moment I'm not well and Richard is pressured. If a job needs to be done, Richard would ask some of those from outside, because it wouldn't take as much time, they wouldn't need much preparation or time building them up. But that is something that troubles me inside. This church was founded for the people of Knowle West.

What I would like to say to the wider church is to listen seriously to women and to working class women because even at diocesan level people who attend the diocesan council will be more middle class women. The gospel is good news for the poor. Jesus came to raise up the downtrodden and how can the downtrodden be raised up if we are not going to know what is keeping them downtrodden?

Observations and Impressions

Joanna was apprehensive about attending the diploma course because she lacked confidence in her academic ability. She rose to the challenge, successfully completed the course and emerged with new confidence and skills. I believe that her vocational commitment to her own development and that of disadvantaged people was a primary factor in enabling her to do this. And this underlies the importance of engendering such commitment in all kinds of people.

Subsequently she was able to use what she had learnt through the course in an entirely different environment to help people to rise to similar challenges. People were enabled to do things which previously they were convinced they were incapable of doing – leading and running clubs, attending a course, acting as first aid bereavement counsellors. Mutual collaborative learning processes induced through a formal academic course worked for people with little or no education in a disadvantaged community setting. The *avec* approach can be used in all kinds of cultural settings. That is highly significant.

Emotionally and intellectually that moves me deeply. Such personal and social changes are critical factors in the regeneration and development of any community, religious or secular. Of themselves they cannot achieve all the environmental, political and power changes required to make areas of deprivation good places in which to live. That is self evident. But, insignificant as they might seem to some in the light of the totality of change required, they must not be dismissed because material change without personal change is the improvement of the body without changing the soul. And, as T. R. Batten is wont to say, "People are the most important part of our environment." Transformative personal changes are essential to betterment and very difficult to achieve. An approach which enables different kinds of people in academic and community settings to take their masks off has enormous potential. When people take off their masks they meet in their realities and that is a place of transforming change.

Maintaining the collaborative learning mode during the diploma course was, however, at times difficult. Joanna refers to one example. We were reflecting on our experiences of power and what we thought about them theologically speaking. We got stuck. Members of the course wanted me to revert to a didactic role. In their

frustration and confusion some of them wanted me to give them their answers. I said I could not do that but I was committed to helping them find them and to them helping me to find mine. They got angry with me. We looked at what was happening in relation to our commitment to collaborative learning and returned to the task, some of them with little enthusiasm and hope. Eventually there was a breakthrough. One member exclaimed in joy, "Goodness, I didn't think we'd be able to get there, but we have." Joanna remembered it well. This is the kind of struggling to which she refers and which was so important in her own struggling to get people to do their own thinking and deciding.

Understandably Joanna focussed on some of the adverse effects of people from outside the parish upon those within it. Undoubtedly there were good effects as well. People from outside of a community can promote the processes described above and enter into the kind of development partnerships Joanna had established. Sadly, however, in my experience, they inhibit such processes more often than they promote them. One of the most common reasons for this is that they lack the ability or knowledge or commitment to work *with* people collaboratively. Or more precisely, in the work they do, they do not differentiate between that which they must do *for* people, that which they must do *with* them and that which they must leave them to do *by* and *for* themselves and *with* each other. Promoting human and spiritual development depends upon getting that combination right for particular people in given circumstances – and the combination is ever changing.



**Two:
EMPOWERED TO EMPOWER
Richard McKay**

Richard McKay, now in his early fifties, is deeply committed to living with and ministering to and with people in areas of deprivation. Since 1978 he has been in the Roman Catholic parish of Christ the King in Knowle West in Bristol, first as a curate and then from 1982, as parish priest. We have had a glimpse at the parish and its people in what his colleague, Joanna Brennan, said in the previous section. He is also the Dean of the South Bristol Deanery which comprises eight parishes served by eleven clergy.

During the diploma course which he attended from 1989 to 1991 I learnt a lot about Richard, his vocation and his many activities. But it was only when I first

visited the parish in 1992 with my wife to share in their patronal festival, that I realised just how much the people loved and respected him.

Richard has a presence and a charisma; he is tall, dark, of good physique; he has enormous energy and enthusiasm; he is a man of prayer and action; he is continually trying to get a quart of activity into a pint of time and that can be trying for those with whom he works; he is outgoing and attractive. Much of this is illustrated by the day I travelled to Bristol to interview him and Joanna. Richard met me at the station but he was very late because a meeting had gone on longer than scheduled and he encountered heavy traffic crossing Bristol. But the warmth and sincerity of his greeting dispelled my anxiety and irritation. Unaided he had cooked lunch for us and his incapacitated parents who were living with him. Several people came to see him before we got started on the interview. Then he went to speak to a Methodist group, a recent invitation he had not been able to resist! I interviewed Joanna. Richard returned. There were two or three interruptions. Dogs barked. Children leaving school seemed to surround the presbytery. Amidst all this Richard was absorbed in our conversation and in the gaps gave me his total attention. And that was only part of his day!

Richard McKay's Reflections, April 1994

I see the two years I spent doing the diploma as a very privileged time in my life, growth and ministry. I went to Avec to get some extra skills. I came away from Avec a more developed person and therefore more skilled. That is systemically important. What was tremendous for me was that the development was centred and rooted in me as a person who works with people, not in my way of working. That changed because I changed. I feel as though I have got something that is distinctly different. It is valuable. I have a different approach and a new perspective and vision. The course opened me experientially to new realms of thinking and it has helped me to focus and channel my reflectiveness quite creatively. It gave me more confidence to take risks, but it wasn't simply a confidence building exercise. I have new skills but they stem from these changes in me. So the approach is not about how can I apply this bit of teaching or that. That is how I point to what, for me, is one of the great things about the *avec* approach.

I've always been a reflective kind of person. I've always needed to think through why I was doing things, what I was doing, what were the wider implications. But I don't think I've ever thought so rigorously and deeply about the nature of the work I was doing as I did on that course. I found that a phenomenally important experience. And it took me a little while to recognise that that was what the course was really about, helping people to study their work in depth, and once that clicked it all fitted into place for me. What Avec has done is to identify a quite uniquely important area, work consultancy. No-one else had perceived it. It came as slightly mind boggling because the last thing I expected when I turned up for that induction course was work consultancy. I didn't know what it was!

A particular aspect of your teaching method stimulated me to think more rigorously and deeply. It was earthed in our own experience. Our own experience was not something we left behind in Bristol. We brought it right into the room and up onto the blackboard or whatever. That was really very important. The work consultancy in

the six-day induction course to the diploma immediately got me thinking of my own situation and my purposes and beliefs. And that immediately got me reflecting on what I was doing, why I was doing it. It became clearer and clearer that I needed to reflect on my own experience of ministry. That was the only authentic way of doing it. But at first sight it seemed quite an abstract exercise. Strangely there is in the Church, a body that is all about reflecting and praying, an activism that is resistant to reflecting on your work. Sifting out and drawing out the inner dynamic and design is, in a sense, quite an abstract exercise. In fact it is very empowering for the work and the people but it takes time to get to that point.

One of the things that took me deeper is reflecting on the nature and theology of empowerment. You helped me to see the non-directive approach as a tool of empowerment. Reflecting on this forced me to face up to how I was performing. Was I as non-directive as I thought I was? Was I really empowering other people or not? My ministry just seemed to be firing off in all sorts of directions, in some ways meaninglessly and in others activity for activity's sake. Then I began to glimpse a coherence. Fundamentally I saw that my ministry was about empowering other people for ministry within the Christian context and in the wider community. Empowerment was the core of ministry for me. I saw that I was working in seven radically different territories, or domains as we called them, for essentially the same things, empowerment and education and the development they bring. That came across to me very strongly. It gave new coherence to me, my life, my work and my ministry. The purpose was empowerment; the method, milieu, ethos had to be collaboration. The linkage between empowerment and collaboration is very, very important to me. Without collaboration there isn't empowerment, not real empowerment, except perhaps self-empowerment.

The research I did for my diploma dissertation explored these insights. What I did was to explore my own life experience of collaborative ministry in those seven domains of collaborative ministry I have just mentioned. They were: shared ministry with Joanna Brennan; Christ the King pastoral team; the parish; the local community; the deanery of which I was dean; the congregations in Knowle West which had covenanted together; "Congregations Organized for a Greater Bristol"¹ But there were other things equally important to me including playing active parts, locally and much wider, in charismatic renewal, justice and peace and counselling and healing ministries.

How I did this research was very important to me. I told my life story to a skilled counsellor. It was recorded as I told it. That was the raw material of my experience upon which we worked. Once I had got it down I could work on it more objectively without confusing my recollections of what happened with my current reflections. I was particularly concerned to uncover those things, and especially my involvement with the *avec* approach, which had encouraged collaborative styles of working and those which had inhibited them. The counsellor and the staff of Avec then helped me to explore in depth the fundamental purposes that had guided my journey as a

¹ This was part of the "broad based community organizing" movement which is a strategy for popular empowerment and social change. The movement was born in the United States in the 1940's through the work of Saul Alinsky. It came to Britain in the eighties.

priest and how I had grown and developed into collaborative ministry. The method, by the way, is a "vocational life-history research method".

It worked amazingly well. It was extremely hard work, completely absorbing, but it was a most revealing and a profoundly self-affirming exercise. It was very important to me. It helped me to gather my life together a bit more at a significant time. I was coming up to forty-eight, time for assessment and re-assessment of one's life. It was a glorious and timely opportunity.

Joanna Brennan, my colleague, and I did the course together and therefore we had space away from the parish to reflect on our work situation and our working together. That deepened our collaboration. We became much more equal partners. We were able to talk on more equal terms and to share responsibility for the parish. And we were supporting each other more in each other's work.

Your way of working with groups by which you risked total participation significantly changed my own teaching method. It was an experience of experiential learning. A shared collaborative, teaching, learning style. And it was genuine, it wasn't being played at, it was for real. And that was very, very important and gave me a lot of confidence to risk it. You really did let go without ever letting go of your purpose. I think there was only once or twice you stopped us from intervening so that you could complete what you wanted to give us. And it was essential that you did it at that time otherwise we couldn't have taken the next steps. This teaching/learning style is open to a lot of manipulation, quite easily it can look like a collaborative style when it is not. What I encountered from you and the others was that it was never manipulative, it was always the genuine thing, there was a real letting go and not possessing the content and structure. Often you allowed us to change the direction radically. My experience of teaching had always been what we call a "banking method;" they have got it, they impart it to us, we imbibe it and reflect on it. Your approach was very different. It was a shared exploration, a shared thinking things through using all our experience and knowledge. Together we shaped the subject matter with an assurance that a richer content would come. You were so often facilitating a mutual learning experience rather than teaching in the classic sense. I found that extremely liberating.

I learned tremendously from the teaching method. It was incredibly important to the learning curve of those two years. Internalising all that changed me as a worker/teacher. Now I give set talks far less often. Of course there are times when that is appropriate, but I don't slip into it straight away as I would have done before. I would stand up give my talk, sit down, and we'd discuss what I'd said. Let me give you a little cameo example. I was responsible with a couple of other people for a diocesan training day for health and healing. Eighty people came on that day, far more than we expected. I could have stood up and given a talk on healing. But would it have related to any of their questions and their greatly varied experience? So we gave them ten minutes to talk together then write out on a piece of paper the questions they would like addressed. I took them away and very hurriedly looked through the papers, classified and grouped the issues they raised and shaped my input around them. I could not have done that before the Avec course.

Then there was the theological method which was different. The way I was taught to do theology was to start with God and to work downwards and outwards. Here we started where we were with our questions, our world and our experience and we tried to understand them within the context of the spiritual and of the divine mystery. We were doing theology from that angle. And while it was something I had experienced in my reading, it was not a method I had ever used with others and wrestled with. That was very different. Some members of the group were very familiar with doing it that way and very much at ease with that sort of method; others of us didn't find it easy, especially doing it in a group of men and women with very different theologies from five denominations. There were lay people, religious, a deaconess, ministers and priests. Some had formal theological training, others hadn't. But it was very creative, although it was also very painful I remember. It was painful because we were wrestling with each other, not only about theological concepts and how to shape them, but also about different ways of doing theology from the ones we had been taught. For a long time I had been dissatisfied with the way I had been taught but I still felt insecure. Sometimes I find insecurity exciting and I did then. So that was all right. The wrestling we did was very important.

One of the results is that I have been able to get people in the parish thinking and reflecting theologically, including people on the estate who don't have the education that I have. That is one of the skills I have developed. I have been able to do that very naturally and instinctively, in lots of different contexts, not necessarily in formal theological contexts. Scripture groups form one such context, importantly because there are quite a few of them in the parish. These groups have people from the local estate as well as other people. They think and reflect together theologically quite well. I have also got people thinking theologically through getting groups to reflect together on each other's "journey of faith". Yet another way, perhaps a strange way, is through morning prayer. Local people and religious take it in turns with me to prepare morning prayer. That helps us to reflect as well.

What I got from the *avec* approach has helped me to reflect on my work and to think things through so that they are more in accord with my purpose. I think that has been internalised. I have become instinctively aware of it. It just comes out all the time. But one of the things I haven't capitalised on sufficiently is the designing of a longer term piece of work. Designing short-term things like a session or a day's retreat or a community project is manageable. What I haven't done sufficiently, I think is to make space to reflect on the overall situation, and especially deep seated and far ranging problems, and to work out long-term plans and strategies. I am finding it increasingly difficult to do so because of Joanna's illness, my parents' decline in health and the escalation of my work. Then there are daily problems to be tackled because of the aggressive behaviour on the estate, social deterioration of the neighbourhood which makes it like living in a house under siege at times and colossal problems in our schools. Alongside all this I have had to run a second parish for eight months during an interregnum. Neglecting long-term planning means I'm into crisis management rather than doing something about the underlying causes. That's the area I have neglected. That has come back to me today in the discussion very strongly. I claim responsibility for that. That hasn't been sufficiently internalised yet. It is interesting that some things have been internalised instinctively, but other things will

be internalised if I make space and make myself do them consciously. Things I have to make space for and make myself do are probably the things that I've done least about. For instance, I'm not sure I am taking the longer view in relation to training our parish catechists. That is not true. I am very good at the long view and the vision, it's the steps in between that I'm not so good at. Then again I'm involved in helping to rebuild a community association on the estate which was evicted from the social centre. I think I have tended to be bit reactive to that rather than thinking it through in relation to the manipulative and bad politics on the estate. It is not my responsibility to run it. I'm there representing the churches because I have ideas. But I haven't been clear about the designing, as well as the analysing that has to be done for a project to succeed.

I do believe and think that eventually it will be possible to get people on the estate, as well as people coming in, to design and work at long term projects. But it will take an enormous amount of energy and time. I am attempting to get people to reflect in different working groups on specific things. So, for instance, a group in the parish is involved in the "Congregations Organized for Greater Bristol" to which I referred earlier. That is what I call an "in and out mixed group", some from the parish and some from better off areas. But that's a bit piecemeal. Certainly, I think there are two groups where long-term planning could naturally happen, the pastoral team and the parish council, which again are in and out mixed groups.

However, there are some difficulties and barriers to be overcome to make it possible. Essentially the people in our community think only in the short-term, it has to be very immediate. In a way that is the beauty of the "Congregations Organizing for Greater Bristol". Generally it involves short-term action-driven things, such as getting social amenities improved. People can see the completion of a piece of work in a relatively short time and go on to something else. It might mean high intensity activity for a month. They can manage that. What is much more difficult is, say, a task that is going to take a year, two years, three years, with ongoing responsibility for the outcome.

Moving from short-term to long-term planning involves breaking through a major barrier. I hadn't connected the two things before. I haven't done enough work to see that actually the problem is not only within me and the pressure but also it's problematic for our community. People are often bumping along on the bottom of survival in a context where hope is at a premium. I didn't quite understand what they meant by the theology of hope in Latin America at one time, now I see more and more what it is all about. It is vitally important. What is so difficult for oppressed, beleaguered poor or impoverished communities is this issue of hope, to be able to lift your eyes from the immediate grind of the here and now and work now for the prospect of something greater. Lack of it diminishes the energy available to work for the future. So I think we need to give people hope to work for long term development processes. Helping them to see the purpose of it is important. It seems abstract and academic precisely because of the remoteness of the time span. It is the coming away from the immediate in order to have time and energy and the psychological and spiritual space that is needed to reflect, to overview. Avec helped me to do that. I think I am spelling out in different ways that without hope it is so difficult to do anything but cope with the immediate here and now.

One of the things that I am experiencing is that it is easier to work collaboratively with lay people than with clergy, and with women than with men. I often wonder why. All our clergy are men, please God it won't stay like that. Some of the clergy complain about the difficulties of working with the deanery pastoral council which is predominantly lay – it is meant to be clergy and lay working together but most of the clergy tend not to come. There has been real griping about it so we had a clergy deanery meeting about it. A lot of negative feelings were targeted on me. One of the things that came out was that my very success – and it was said in those terms – in empowering lay people and my freedom in working with them actually causes great difficulties for other clergy. They don't feel able to work like that therefore they feel de-skilled, alienated and marginalised by the fact that I'm enabling others to function in a context of freedom, equality and partnership and strongly affirming lay roles when they are not. And not only that, but their lay people in the Deanery who have not been part of those developments over the years like people in my parish also find it difficult. They're more comfortable with having authoritarian relationships with their priests. So some clergy are feeling that if I empower lay people I am dis-empowering them. And some lay people who have the same approaches as their clergy feel the same.

A number of clergy have talked to me about it privately. I've said, "You know the difficulty with empowerment is that you can only empower lay people by being prepared to let go of some of your own power as clergy. We clergy find that very difficult." We've got to tackle the issue of power. It is part of what I would like to do further studies and research on. I think we need to take seriously that the empowerment of some has to be at the expense of the dis-empowerment of others. It has to be that way. There has to be the letting go of power and the trusting of others so I think there is a very big issue about power in the church, where it lies, and the re-modelling of ministry. Just as we have to re-model what mission is about we have to re-model what ministries, primarily the ordained ministry but also other forms of ministry, are about. So often they are not about empowering others. As I indicated earlier, the *avec* approach has a key contribution to make to the redistribution of power.

Observations and Impressions

It is fascinating to have from Joanna and Richard two independent perspectives on the same course and its application to the same working situation through different roles. One of the things it illustrates is the way in which the outworking of the approach, which both have to some degree internalized, is influenced by personality, acculturation and opportunity. Joanna has a flair for using it with Knowle West people upon whom she concentrates but not with those from outside. Whereas Richard uses it with a wider social and educational range and probably does his best work in mixed groups. Quite naturally in this and other ways they are complementary workers.

Richard summed up his experience of the Avec course in this way, "I went to Avec to get some extra skill. I came away from Avec a more developed person and therefore more skilled." Richard's summing up of his experience is a penetrating insight into what is involved in becoming better workers and ministers. It is as much about inner motivation and attitude as it is about technical and human relations

skills. The approach is rooted within people, outwardly orientated and expressed through methods and action. Our ability to promote human and spiritual betterment and growth is closely related to our capacity to love and care for people, our human relations skills, our analytical and design skills and our spiritual resources. In turn, these things are related to our human and spiritual maturity. All these qualities and competencies affect our ability to be reflective practitioners in church and community work.

The importance of all this becomes quite clear when power is changing hands. Such transactions make very heavy demands upon the maturity as well as the human relations skills of all involved whether the changes are voluntary or not. Those sharing power need to be empowered to empower others; those accepting it need to learn how to use their new found empowerment. It would seem that some of Richard's colleagues and lay people were simply not equipped to work with people on a more egalitarian basis. Arguably the fact that they did not have a say or a part in the processes of empowerment of "their" lay people made them feel worse. Sharing power, it is claimed, is gaining power but it doesn't always feel like that! How complicated it is in complex systems to empower some when it means disempowering others. The non-directive approach can assist people to make and accept power changes when there is a general desire for them. When there is some resistance it can sometimes help to create conditions more conducive to changing the balance of power in favour of the disempowered. It can also help those who don't want power changes but cannot prevent them happening, to examine the problems they are experiencing. But it cannot force power changes. That is contrary to its nature. Other means must be used where and when it is necessary to force change.

Formidable barriers exist between long- and short-term planning and working for short- and long-term gratification especially in areas such as Knowle West. Richard's experience illustrates this. The cultural factors are well documented. How to overcome them is not. Family feuding on the estate was one of the problems we discussed over lunch and the way it was causing problems in school and church. Circumstances constrain them to deal with incidents rather than causes. They simply cannot find time and energy to do the analysis and research which would enable them to design and carry out a long-term strategy of action and education most likely to effect the personal and social change needed. I feel deeply for them. Perhaps this is a point at which people from outside could collaborate with them on formulating strategic development plans.

One of the things I was interested to explore with Richard was how he felt theologically about the diversity of interests and ministry and the many different domains in which he was working. He did not, he said, find any inner dissonance. On the contrary he found a theological coherence at the heart of all his activities associated with empowerment and collaborative ministry. That emerges clearly in his diploma dissertation already referred to. He found coherence in the diversity of his ministry strongly oriented to people in need and particularly the most disadvantaged but not restricted to them.

But he said that his approach to ministry took him into a place of dissonance within the Roman Catholic Church because he feels the official church is becoming

“more rigid, more authoritarian, clericalised and restrictive of power”. The following conversation took place:

“Do you regret being in that place of dissonance?”

“I suppose I see it as my calling.”

“Do you find it hard?”

“Yes, I find it costs, and it costs more, but I also find in it an increasing freedom to be who I am in that context. But that very inner freedom becomes a challenge to others. Because I am fully aware that it is precisely my freedom that presents a difficulty for my fellow clergy.”

As I edited this interview I felt again the privilege and excitement of listening to Richard thinking aloud and making connections for instance about short- and long-term planning he hadn't made before. To share in the thinking processes of others is, for me, one of the great human and spiritual satisfactions.



**Three:
FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE
David Herrick**

From 1988 to 1995 David Herrick, now in his mid forties, was the parish priest of St George's, situated on a working class council housing estate on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds. He is now the vicar of Great Barton. It was his first incumbency after two assistant curacies and five years as an “organization and methods officer” with the London Borough of Camden. David is a quiet thoughtful person, expresses himself clearly, precisely and with an economy of words and only speaks in groups when he has something to say.

We first met when we were the back seat passengers in a car on a thirty mile journey to a meeting to launch a three-year project in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. Very soon the conversation became a vigorous work consultancy session. Later, I learnt that it was this conversation that persuaded David to join the work study course associated with the project.

The project in which David participated was organized by the Bishop's Council as a diocesan project about “making shared ministry a reality” throughout the diocese. The members of the Bishop's Council invited me to lead a residential conference for them, to sit in on some of their sessions and to discuss my observations with them.

There was an extended work study course for priests and deacons in which David took part. Three people, including David, were seconded to the Avec/Roehampton Institute diploma courses to equip them to act as trainers and consultants in the diocese. When this work was completed all who had participated met to share and evaluate their experiences and determine the implications for shared ministry in the Diocese. David was drawing upon his experience of this project, the diocesan course and the diploma (1991-93).

St George's Parish comprises two council housing estates with a small amount of private housing. It has a population of 7,300. The majority of the population are working class. The first estate was built in 1946 to rehouse people from the town centre; the other was built in the '60's as a London overspill development. Although the two estates are contiguous, the people have a strong awareness of which estate they live on. This derives from differences in the origins of the population, the ages of the community and the physical character of the estates. Geographically the parish is isolated from the town centre by a dual carriageway and the railway line. There are only two crossing points.

The area has been described as “the part of Bury that Bury likes to forget”. The 1960's estate has had a reputation as a Housing Department “dumping ground”.

David Herrick's Reflections, December 1993 and April 1994

When I was preparing to take up my first incumbency at St. George's I realised that I'd been trained to minister but not to be an incumbent – and that is quite a different matter. So I wrote to Dick Garrard, the Adviser for Continuing Ministerial Education in the Diocese, asking him whether there was any system of review and support within the diocese which would help me as I learned to be an incumbent. He said there wasn't anything at that stage but we arranged to meet monthly to talk about what was happening to me as the incumbent of St George's.

Dick mentioned that he was hoping to involve Avec in the diocese. My interest was raised because we had begun to talk about how I could relate to a community which was strange to me. I had never lived on a council estate before. It seemed to me to be a very static community. People stay within the parish as do the younger generations. Children of families come back to live in the area but not many other people come from outside Bury St Edmunds unless they are in housing need. That was quite significant for my work. Consequently compared to other places where I've lived and worked, they're static in terms of experience. There isn't that kind of leavening effect of people coming in from outside bringing new ideas and different experiences. Also, it surprises me how the people that I work with in many cases have not travelled very far. They live a lot of their lives on their estate and backwards and forwards to the town centre. That again limits their experience.

We were discussing how to share ministry effectively in this parish where people lacked experience of being enabled to minister, lacked confidence and were not asking for that kind of thing. In fact they would resist it. A very different situation from the middle class places where I'd worked where people were used to exercising, and expecting to have, power within the life of the church and to be influential. This congregation had had a more authoritarian model of ministry for the vicar than I wanted

to go with. I needed to learn how to begin to understand the wider community of the parish, to share ministry, to work collaboratively with them.

So, when Dick offered the invitation to join the Avec course on "making shared ministry a reality" I was very interested. That was how you and I ended up travelling together from Bury St Edmunds to Reydon in April 1990 to a meeting about that course. During our conversation in the car, George, we talked about what was going on in St George's and the nature of the parish. The approach that you took, the way you looked at things resonated with my own feelings about the place. What do I mean by that? I felt that there was actually something in what was emerging from the conversation that I could use. I had already come to value the conversations I had with Dick which I now know to have been work consultancy. I saw a continuity between what he had done and what you were doing with me. What you did on that day was in some senses more detailed than he and I had been able to manage. What I would say, George, is that I sensed that you were bringing a deep appreciation of what was going on for me in that place which was something I hadn't actually either had the opportunity to discover in other people or receive from other people. You did that even though you'd never been to our estate. My interpretation of that would be that that is to do with the *avec* approach to things - trying to get inside what is happening to people, listening to them and drawing upon any other experiences, such as your knowledge of the Blackbird Leys Estate in Oxford, to understand what is happening.

What stands out from the conversation and the course was the disciplined way in which the whole thing was approached. That made it different from casual conversations which one has about St George's in all kinds of contexts. On the course we approached discussions about work situations in a very disciplined way. First there was the tough but helpful framework for writing work papers. That led me to a useful piece of analysis and actually enabled me to get out my understanding of the situation. Then we worked on the papers in our group in what was a disciplined way. One of the ground rules I appreciated was, "You listen to what the person is saying, and you talk about that and not about anything else. No anecdotes."

I recognized immediately that the approach was collaborative. It modelled what I wanted to put into practice in my own situation - and that's true of working in situations in a non-directive way. I saw that at the levels of belief and understanding there was a lot in common between where I'd got to and what Avec was saying about working *with* people and taking them seriously. I don't mean being long faced but using a method which actually recognizes the importance of the individual within the community. I saw the value that working in that way gives to the community. I had worked on the basis that the church does things to and for the wider community. It was part of my learning to discover that actually that wasn't necessarily going to be the best way. A better way was to work with the wider community and for the wider community; to enable people to have a voice; to work for the church and the wider community; to be interdependent. Anyhow, at a pragmatic level, I couldn't see how a very small church was going to be able to do a great deal for the parish unless in some way which I had not defined we could actually work with the parish community. At the simple level of resources we were not going to be able to make a tremendous impact. So both from belief and from the practicalities I came to the same conclusion - but

that may have been self-fulfilling. So, I found that I had a new, strong, aspiration to work with the community. It is still early days. I feel we haven't made a great deal of progress though I think that our church congregation is becoming more aware of its place within the community and less isolated.

One of the things which surprised me about those courses and the *avec* approach was the experience of a different kind of forum. Different, that is, from most of the places in which I had been involved in sharing ideas as an ordinand and before that when I was studying for my degree, but also in other less structured situations. The normal way was essentially what you might call disputational. It was to do with argument and counter-argument and in a sense to do with success in arguing in order to carry the day. What I had now seen happening, and which I value greatly, was that we were creating a different kind of forum in which I could express my own ideas and understandings without being thought foolish, without being valued as an individual on the basis of the ideas that I'd expressed. For instance, I don't think that I have ever been on any academic activity where I have been asked whether the way in which we were going about things was acceptable and helpful in the way that you and Catherine Ryan and Mark Sanders frequently did on the diploma course. This was very important. The academic experience that I had previous to the Avec courses was that material was served up and one took it and digested it or not as the case might be. Reaction was not necessarily encouraged.

You told me that whilst you were on the Batten's three-month course you made a point which was heavily criticized by several members of the group. As you listened to the criticism you said that you became defensive and eventually said something like, "I wish to argue my case more fully." Batten came across to you, stood towering over you, looked down and, as I recall the story, he said, "Mr Lovell, we don't argue cases here, we explore them." That epitomizes what I'm actually getting at. The courses gave me a freedom to participate which I had not experienced anywhere before. In turn, I saw that as something which I would like to offer other people and especially to those in my parish who just don't have the confidence that enables them to participate.

I started off on the diploma very keen on being non-directive. Through doing that course I have grown in my awareness of the need to adopt a style of leadership and use methods appropriate to the contexts in which I am working. That is much more complex. For example, I don't think it's actually possible to run a parochial church council non-directively from beginning to end because of its purpose and structure. Although on occasions I think it's possible and valuable to take items and work at them in a non-directive way so that people can think things out.

It's only six months since the diploma finished and I'm still at that stage of assimilating and, in fact, of wanting to go back through the material which I've accumulated over two years both to organize it better and to review it.

One of things which has affected the way that I work, is looking at the process and at the end product. I've become much more concerned to keep notes of what's going on in meetings and more systematic about writing them up afterwards. They contain reflections on what took place as well as what the end results were. My hope would

be to get beyond that to a stage where it would also be normal to consult the people involved about what they thought about what happened. I find this is helping me to understand meetings, how to plan them and how to make my own contributions. This process helped me to recognize that presenting a written report to St George's Parochial Church Council in advance effectively stifled discussion. A verbal report I believe would have been an effective discussion starter. Presenting a written report was a middle class way to help people prepare for a discussion. I just assumed that it would be an efficient way of working in this different culture. But it had the reverse effect. The members of the Council did not get creatively involved because they saw the written report as a finished product to be accepted.

I have aspirations for the future. When my new curate comes in the summer, I hope that we will be able to contract with one another to reflect together in a systematic way the processes of interaction between people in meetings, the church and the community. And that we might also help each other to become better practitioners by talking to each other about, for instance, the way in which we led meetings. That should help with one of the things that sometimes disturbs me in meetings. Those who lead them don't actually recognize what they are doing. They are aware of what they are doing business-wise but they don't actually recognize the effects upon people of the way that they present themselves and handle the business. Experiencing and studying the *avec* approach has made me far more aware of who I am as a person and a priest. It has helped me to distinguish between that awareness and the expectations that I have of myself which are engendered by what other people expect of a Church of England parish clergyman. Those expectations can be obstructive as well as facilitating. The *avec* approach is helping me to work with both a bit more creatively.

It is clear from what I have said that I am convinced of the value of reflecting on my work. And I've learnt that working non-directively requires a lot of thought beforehand and preparation. Making the time to do these things in a thoroughgoing way is hard. Alongside that I have the sense of being on my own. It is difficult to tell the people with whom I'm working about the understandings and the theoretical basis from which I come. So, if they are to be of any encouragement to me it is likely that it will come in response to the way a meeting or a particular piece of work went. They're not coming at it at all from the theoretical side. I say that although I think that the situation has improved to a small extent. But it is still very hard to get the people I work with to actually reflect and to comment on anything. They see me as the person with the authority, the training, and the knowledge. They feel inferior because they do not reckon they have those things. That means that they are inhibited from making either constructive or destructive comments about what happens. They are very hesitant. I think that's true across a broad spectrum of activity and within the life of the congregation.

It seems to me that there are several possible reasons why they are so reluctant to express themselves and give their opinion. One is how they see me and how they relate to me. They may not feel that I am willing to listen. I may not have given the invitations in ways which engage with them. Another reason is that to be consulted and to be invited to be significant is not in the nature of their experience in other parts of their lives, or even perhaps in the past life within the church. Then there's

what I've mentioned before, they think that I am, as it were, the one with the cards in my hand and that they have no aces. So it is difficult to get them to respond to my initiatives – and not just in relation to meetings or other activities in the life of the church where I endeavour to use non-directive approaches. It is also true of preaching and in getting their wider response to worship. If I make a suggestion about something that I believe might be valuable they tend to defer to me and say, "Yes, we'll go with you." They simply don't think there should be dialogue before that decision is made. I think they might even wonder why there should be dialogue at all. That brings us back to the attitude, "It's his job, he ought to know." It's getting better but it has been difficult and still is difficult. Old attitudes hang on. But it's likely to take a long time to get them to become more responsive and to take leads.

When my wife and I went to St George's six years ago, we had begun to develop an interest in the ministry of healing. There was no overt expression of that within the life of the congregation. But we discovered that there had been in the past a prayer group somewhat on the fringe of St George's which had begun to explore that work in ministry. So we began to talk with them about it in an informal way. Eventually, after about two and a half years, we felt it right to raise it in a more formal way. We did so by teaching and preaching about it. A self-selected group of interested people gathered. That group has kept together and has been involved to a degree in some public ministry of prayer for poor people. Last autumn it seemed right to get the group to review things. Over a lengthy evening meeting I endeavoured to give them the opportunity to formulate a vision, a sense of where they wanted to go, what they wanted to happen in this ministry of prayer and healing. They were very positive. They had lots of ideas and a very clear picture of the ideal that they could see themselves working towards. That has become the agenda that we are working on. I am pleased about that. It is progress in the right direction. I approached that meeting very much wanting that the agenda should be set by the members: I deliberately refrained from presenting them with something that I wanted them to accept nor did I prescribe what we should do.

I've been thinking quite a bit about how to "share ministry". I don't like that term by the way. It sounds as if I'm sharing something that I hold. Ministry is something that is ours, not mine. I have become acutely aware of the need to introduce people to ministry carefully, to support them in it and to be absolutely certain that they are trained for what they are doing. Just asking them to go and do something is not right. Process is important. I have seen people asked to take on ministry without the correct support and it has become a very bad experience for them and they have withdrawn. Care in approaching people is very important. We need to be thoroughgoing in sharing ministry. That is a word which is true of the *avec* approach, it is thoroughgoing.

Members of the church council have decided that they want to promote house groups as a regular feature of the life of the congregation. They see them as particularly good opportunities of teaching and for fellowship. They want to make it possible for any member of the congregation who so chooses to be part of a group. To do that, we invited people who were at all interested, to share in some training. We had three sessions of simple training in group leadership. We got off to a good start. They've only

had a little training. They need my support and help. The next thing to do is to introduce them to the material we might look at in the groups. My problem is to find the time to meet with them regularly. It's been quite hard to make the space for this new activity of supporting them because of my existing work load.

To reduce it to basics I have too much work to do. I guess I could find time by reducing the amount of work I do in other areas or by working more overtime. Both are likely to generate conflict: the first within me about work which is not done; the second with my family. The only alternative is to go back to basics and ask my people to give me permission not to do something in order to do something else. That's about reorganizing work priorities and the distribution of effort. I feel very isolated as far as the responsibility for doing that is concerned. It is hard to know how to share that with people in my congregation. There's nobody in my situation with whom I can discuss all the issues on an equal basis in a thoroughgoing manner. Nobody is asking to discuss them. So, there's a whole lot of things I've got to work out myself. I have to be the initiator until people in the congregation have gained experience. Now that I am clearer about this, I may be able to discuss them with my new curate.

One of the factors which I think makes church life difficult for me and my work is the frequency with which external initiatives arrive on my desk. For instance the diocese may wish all parishes to take on a particular activity for a given period of time. For example in 1995 we were to have a "Diocesan Festival of Faith". That was new. A one-off project. It may bear fruit in the longer term indirectly. Previously there have been other things. One year there was the "On Fire Project". Another year there is to be a mission in Bury St Edmunds organized by local churches. All worthwhile things, but requiring energy, time and thought. But they often feel like distractions from the task of working steadily over a long period for local development. I feel obliged to take these things seriously. But I think they need to be recognized as distractions, diversions of what energy I have. I'm not saying that they are necessarily negative for the members of the church and congregation, that would be too much of a blanket judgement. But they do require attention from me. There is only a finite amount that I can do. All of those things are there to be taken into account. I find that quite hard. I don't always have the tenacity to keep at things when I know that I should. Steadfastness doesn't come easy. And there is a tendency in me to want to take short cuts. The *avec* approach helps me through its concentration on working on the local development agenda and its emphasis on persistently working at things stage by stage in long-term processes. But that's hard to do and so diversions are tempting.

I work and minister in various kinds of settings: I conduct worship, I celebrate communion; I conduct weddings and funerals; I make pastoral visits; I conduct business meetings. I exercise different kinds of roles. With regard to the weddings and funerals I am acting as a pastor but also as what one might call an "articulator". I have a priestly role within the context of worship of helping people to express their feelings, their understandings, their gropings towards faith, or within faith. One couldn't do those things if one adopted a *laissez faire*, permissive or non-directive approach. The ultimate result would be something that felt chaotic for people. So I have to function as a leader, certainly in worship and from time to time in other respects

within the community because, I suppose, I'm a representational and representative figure. Most of the time that doesn't clash with working *with* rather than *for* people for development.

The place where I find dissonance is in relation to the occasional offices, baptisms, marriages and burials. People recognize very quickly if one is not authentic in relating to them or if one is being condescending. The difficulty comes, I think, when one has to act out of authority and maybe most acutely when one has to say no. Remarriage of divorced people is a difficult matter for me. I am very hesitant about remarrying those who've been divorced. My personal stance to some extent reflects the position taken up by the diocese. But I have the authority to decide whether or not to remarry divorcees. Often the cost is high of sticking to my convictions and refusing to marry a couple one or both of whom have been divorced. People find my position and decision unacceptable and I lose the opportunity to work with them and to offer them the valuing that I would otherwise wish them to have. I haven't resolved that one yet.

It's all part of the tension between taking one's beliefs seriously and taking people seriously – and the theology of creation, the cross and the *avec* approach do that. Sometimes the tension is creative; sometimes it isn't.

For me, holding together preaching and working with communities as communities is important. I trace the importance of community back to the community which is the Trinity. Working with communities as communities is important for other reasons as well which I don't think I've adequately worked out but I believe that we live in a society which is highly individualistic and there are many disintegrating forces at work within it. The Gospel actually counters that. Preaching the Gospel, in the very direct sense of calling individuals to repentance and commitment, is very important although I don't consider myself gifted as an evangelist. But nor do I think that that by itself will do. One cannot engage in that evangelistic task of calling people to repentance and commitment without working with them on how we can live out our commitment in our context. So preaching the Gospel and working with people go together. My experience of the tension of preaching – and I think particularly of preaching in its broadest sense as distinct from preaching the Gospel – is that in preaching it is all too easy to offer something which does not engage with people's lives: to offer them well constructed theological statements which don't actually impinge on them and their circumstances. It's easy, for instance, to preach that you must grow in your commitment without helping people to connect that with their day by day experience. That is dangerous. The *avec* approach to church and community development helps people to work out just what the preaching means in practice.

Practising the *avec* approach has helped me to become increasingly more systematic. One can make a god, an idol out of being systematic and I think there are times in my life when I've been very drawn to that. I find that being systematically reflective or preparing for work in a systematic way does not exclude the power of the spirit and inspiration. Reflection and preparation run alongside prayer, not against it. In fact, structures which help me to think, free me to be open to inspiration. When I achieve clarity about my aims and approach to a particular piece of work I am more comfortable and confident. Then my inner ear is more likely to be open. If I'm ill

prepared and uncomfortable I am more likely to be trapped in my inner disorder. What I have just said about the dialogue within myself, my private thinking, is also true in the context of the public thinking and acting. The kind of preparation that I am talking about which is so much part of the *avec* approach frees me to respond to others and their ideas. I don't see any inspiration that I might have received through my preparation as a stereotype that's got to be followed through and worked out. It's not a case of organizing the way things will happen. It's about preparing myself to get other people to think and to think with them so that we are all open to each other's ideas and inspire one another.

One thing that does worry and frustrate me is that I find difficulty in sharing the *avec* experience with Anglican clergy working in parishes. I have found the combination of practical experience with theory has been valuable: the one informs the other. I can talk to clergy about the theory but they have to be able to enter into the experience to really discover its significant value. For me personally, it is difficult to say something about an experience that, as I said at the beginning, is essentially about a kind of forum different from anything that they are likely to have experienced. And the forums in which I have to explain the *avec* approach are not set up to receive that kind of thing. They are the antithesis of the forums I have come to value through *Avec*. I suppose if I were to speak about the *avec* approach at Chapter meetings I would be questioning the way those meetings work. It is difficult for people to hear what you are saying when it presents them with such radical challenges to the way they go about things.

Observations and Impressions

David Herrick allows us the privilege to see and sense the problems he encountered at an early stage of trying to introduce people in a housing estate church and his colleagues to ideas and practices about shared ministry which were foreign to them and to their different cultures. There is the glimmer of a breakthrough here and there but no overall breakthrough yet. We have the privilege of entering into the raw experience of this particular stage of initiating new ideas and practices. A stage marked by the disturbing interaction between the experiences of meeting people and discovering approaches which engendered vocational liberation and excitement; the new and old forums; the difficulty of putting the *avec* approach into practice; the local intellectual and vocational isolation in his parish and loneliness from quite different cultural groups, parishioners and clergy.

These things are related to some of the problems of conversion from one way of working to another. Problems of getting parishioners to be more actively involved as partners in the ministry and work of the parish; of being the initiator of long-term development programmes in a situation in which he felt intellectually isolated with too heavy a work-load and sometimes pressurised by diocesan schemes. By their very nature these problems showed that the approaches and methods that David had come to value through the courses were desperately needed.

Whilst all this is happening to practitioners, work study groups and work consultancy sessions are oases. Such resources need to be permanently available because those who are differentiated as leaders and development workers continually experience separation. To maintain their independence of thought and their integrity there

are some things they simply must not discuss in their own community. So they need safe thinking houses, places where they can think openly, radically, honestly and constructively with impunity. Thinking about people and situations must be aimed at discovering ways of thinking *with* them about all kinds of things to do with life and faith including tricky interpersonal issues. At times workers will have to think *for* other people but that is only a means to an end in development work.

Ministers are expected to study spiritual things and to spend time praying and preparing sermons, addresses and services of worship. Almost all those with whom I have worked, however, have said that they were not adequately trained to study their work and situation. David said he was trained to minister but not to be an incumbent. Neither were they expected to allocate time to analysing the life and work of the church in its social context, to reflect on the outcome and to design programmes – and then to do these things with lay people through shared ministry. Consequently David has not only to learn how to do these things whilst doing a job in which he has “too much work to do” but he has to find a way of reshaping the job and the expectations of parishioners so that there is built in time for him and them to be reflective practitioners. Some undertaking!

And, if this task is not a big enough challenge, he and his parishioners are regularly invaded by external initiatives which collide with local development plans, present no-win choices, engender a conflict of commitment, deflect resources and dissipate energy. To say that local people should simply ignore or resist such external initiatives and hold to their internal agenda is to misunderstand the realities of conflicting loyalties and the desires to participate in something bigger and apparently more successful. Even so David said that he had some responsibility, “I have a measure of control over how I work although there are choices which are made outside my control.” I have seen this over and again, not least in religious orders. Local work and workers are doubly deprived, from within and without. Action “from above” should always promote growth “from below”. It is incumbent upon those who control and influence things from without and above to take a lot of care to ensure that the schemes and projects they promote do engender local development.

Once more we see that promoting lasting change for the better in people and their environment in such areas is a long slow haul which makes heavy demands upon workers, their maturity, skills and dedication. But then, as David said, “the method is not a quick fix”.

I think David's hunch about writing notes of meetings and events is sound. Browsing over them could give him vital clues about how to promote shared ministry. It could give him insights into the way in which he presents himself, which is one of his concerns. I have learnt a lot about how to work with people in groups, organizations and communities by writing records of meetings in which I have been engaged. A record is a written structured account of a meeting setting out essentials of how the members of the group related and worked together and what they said and decided in relation to their purposes.

As I reflect on all this I see David as someone supercharged by burgeoning thought which does not flow as freely as it needs to do in local conversations. It is

beginning to. Perhaps he should simply talk with anyone who will listen. Discussing his work priorities is of itself a sharing of ministry. He could ask them how they felt about the *avec* approach and draw upon their local expertise by asking them how to get people, local people, talking about it. It's getting the right mixture of experience and being introduced to the theory. But possibly that is to misunderstand the constraints David is experiencing.



**Four:
LEADERS WHO BLOCK CHANGE
Christine Sales**

The essentials of this story are true. Christine Sales and Brunswick are pseudonyms to avoid undoing the development bought at a high price and hurting people unnecessarily. The real Christine Sales told and checked the story. It is included because it covers ground not covered by the other stories.

Christine Sales is a minister in her forties. Before she was ordained, she was a teacher and then a national training officer in youth work. After two years in a theological college she spent three years in a city centre church. Then she was appointed the minister of Brunswick where she served for seven long, demanding but formative years. Now she is a minister in a suburban church.

Brunswick, a joint Methodist/United Reformed church, is on a working class housing estate in a large city. It was established in the 1950's. Administratively it is under the care of the Methodist Church. It operates as one congregation and is always staffed by a Methodist minister, although accommodation is made for URC practices. Christine was the first woman minister.

The church grew alongside the development of the estate. A number of families have been members of the church from the beginning. When Christine started her ministry, young parents who first established the church were reaching retirement age and their families had grown up and moved from the area through marriage and work. Consequently there were more older people in the congregation than young families. Some younger families are beginning to move into private housing adjacent to the estate but on the whole the estate is an ageing community. A small number of families lived in private housing. The standard of housing on the estate was good and

many families had bought their own property from the council. There was a village community atmosphere and little evidence of vandalism. There were local shops, a doctor's surgery, a community centre and a primary school on the estate.

Christine Sales' Reflections, January 1995

My first experience of Avec was a ten-day course which you and Catherine Widdicombe led in a provincial city. There were lay, religious, ministers and priests from four or five denominations on that course. One of the main things that struck me was the direct relevance of the *avec* approach to the wide spectrum of ministry within the church and development work in the community which they were doing. I was impressed by the way in which the principles and the methods were being worked out in a variety of situations. Looking very closely at my own work was very important.

That course gave me the basic principles of ways of working non-directively; it gave me tools to handle and to organize my work and to do in-depth studies of my own work situation and those of others. Good work paper sessions were critical. When you're looking at your own situation you are really owning your own work in a new way through owning what is going on in the group. You have a strong vested interest in what is happening because it is your work and your future. You are dealing with your possibilities. Working on other people's work helped me with my job.

I'm sure I didn't get half of what was going on in those early Avec days. What I did get whetted my appetite. I knew it was very relevant for my own career and for the career of others. Seventeen years later I'm even more aware of that. I think that it was critical that it came at that point in my career. I had the teaching skills and background which were useful in my work. The *avec* approach enabled me to move beyond the point of just doing work to ask, "What am I doing?" "Why am I doing it?" and most importantly, "How am I doing it and is that the best way to do it?" I began to formulate theories about my work and think out how to put them into practice. Pursuing those questions took me out of the immediate and made me look forward and build new skills onto my old ones. I was learning the importance of planning for development and working out what the churches and I could do towards making it happen. What I had discovered was that I could be an agent in bringing change and promoting development in people and their environment. What has stayed with me throughout all the years is that I am never content that things stay as they are. I'm always asking, "How can this situation develop/change/improve?" "What more could we be doing that would enhance the work and the lives of the people, deepen their faith, stimulate them to be more active in their Christian witness and service?"

All this helps me to be as objective as possible when I get into the situation, although you can't be completely objective. It helps me to watch and to listen to what the people in the situation are saying. Now that may eventually have to be challenged if it proves to be inhibiting development and growth. But, if you are going to check your conclusions and put your energy into the important things, you need to first watch, listen and evaluate what is emerging as a base for planning the future. I've discovered that when I don't do this private work I get into a muddle.

The origins of those deep seated changes in me were in that first ten-day course. Ever since then in each job that I've been in, and certainly when I've been in a new situation, I've been fortunate in being able to have work paper sessions or consultations with someone in *Avec*. I've always done that when moving into something new to help me to understand what it is that is making that situation as it is at that particular point; the things that are keeping it going, holding it together and pulling it apart. This prepares me to work to the actualities of a situation, how it is here and now and not what you think or wish it to be. It helps me to work with the people on their understanding of the situation and mine until we get a joint understanding upon which we can move forward together towards how we want things to be. In other words what I am saying is, "Here I am. I've come into this situation. This is how it is now. This is how I see it. I bring something new and something different and you are different to what I've experienced before. How do we continue to sustain what is good in this situation? Are there areas that need to be developed? Are there weaknesses that need attention? How do we together identify these things and decide what we ought and can do about them."

This is a very different approach from what I see happening. I get the impression that some ministers have a blue print of what ministry is and they simply take that like a stencil and set it on each church they go to. I don't believe that's the right way to approach any church. That's not what ministry's about for me. As I've said, it's about finding out what's happening, who the people are, what their needs are. What you do in church "B" may be very different from what you did in church "A". As ministers we've got to accept that it's got to be different and to be able to acquire the skills to do the new things that are needed. Relying on things that worked in church "A" and doing the things that we're good at is unlikely to develop the work in church "B". That only has people saying after a few years things like: "Oh well, she was great at youth work, she was good with music."

I have had no difficulty in using these methods with the leaders of one of the congregations to which I am now the minister. They are middle class and used to discussing things at work but not in the church. Previously they tended to let the church drift along. Provided they had a congregation on a Sunday morning and the finances were okay, then everything was fine. They have responded very positively, but you have to keep at it. I think it will take a while too before they do it automatically themselves. Slowly more people are taking responsibility and sharing in the leadership which has been fairly restricted. They are beginning to learn how to use thinking tools in the church. But sustaining and developing the thinking processes, that is the problem.

It was a very different story in my previous church in Brunswick. That was a united Methodist and United Reformed Church serving an estate of local authority housing. Many of the leaders were in the sixties and seventies age group. They had been running the church since it was set up thirty years previously. They had a very strong sense of ownership of Brunswick; in fact they were possessive about it. They didn't sit down to talk about things, they just got on with them in the ways they wanted to. My progress with them was slowed down at the beginning because of differences I became clear about only after several months. I was operating out of my

third level education and the importance of reasoning things out and coming to a consensus and working together. They were operating much more instinctively, individualistically and informally.

They reacted to things and if their reaction was one of anger, well, they literally shouted and bawled. Their behaviour patterns I could only describe as temper tantrums. These very emotional responses took me unawares at times. They could flare up very unexpectedly and very quickly and often over trivial issues that you didn't think ought to cause that kind of reaction. They were very disturbing incidents. They caused a lot of fear and anxiety in me even though I had some confidence in the skills I had acquired through *Avec* to try to analyse the situations and to figure out what was going on and to try to understand why people were behaving in the ways they were. They were intellectually and emotionally exhausting and demanding experiences.

The *avec* approach, work paper sessions and consultations gradually helped me to understand why it was happening, to ride the storms and to think out ways of dealing with them. To try to reason things out with them in my way simply didn't work. We had to find other ways around it. Decisions weren't necessarily made in the Leaders' Meeting where you discussed things and possibly got these emotional outbursts. They were made ad-hoc whenever you got them to the point of making a decision.

During the diploma course I got some insights into the underlying causes and dynamics through making careful notes of events and then studying them. The deep seated conflict was essentially about power, influence and status. Being a woman minister disturbed their understanding and experience that traditionally authority resides in the male person. Some leaders wanted to have absolute control over the church. Many people were insecure. There were divisions, suspicion and fear between the leaders. This was going on before I arrived.

It took us the first three years of a seven year ministry, to really work through to more manageable and effective working relationships. It was very stressful work and change was slow. I knew from fairly early on that some of the personalities on the committee that controlled the church had to change or be replaced. One way would have been simply to have gone in heavy handed and put some people out of office and replace them, that is, I could have been a new broom that swept clean. I felt that such an authoritarian approach wasn't the right one. It would alienate and lose people in a situation where there was division amongst the leaders and widespread suspicion which is still there. I inherited all that! And there was an all pervasive additional problem, I was a woman. The first woman minister in that church. With hindsight I could say that maybe it wasn't wise to put a woman in Brunswick at that time, but they did. And a woman who was very different in personality, approach and theology from the man who had just left and who had been instrumental in causing the faction. I was different from all my other predecessors who had been traditional and directive.

The first thing I did was to build up working relationships with a few key people. It was a year and a half at least before I felt I really had their full trust. One or two of them were new to responsibility in the church. I had brought them in after some conflict with other people. I got that little nucleus together. We talked informally in their own homes or wherever, about the situation and the approach I wanted to

adopt. Gradually one by one the folk who were still creating a lot of conflict withdrew from the main church committee. It took three years to get that turnover and to get new blood in and new life into the lay leadership of the church.

Those who withdrew didn't cause trouble. Sometimes they cold shouldered people who were supposed to be their friends who stood for election for appointments on the committee. That was hurtful. But the new people had the confidence with my encouragement to keep going at it. Those who had withdrawn did not leave the church. There was the odd personality problem but on the whole they stayed on the side lines. New folk feared that when I left, the old guard would try to get round the new minister and get into power. Well, one or two have edged their way in, but the majority haven't and so that fear, I'm glad to say, has not been realised.

So, new people were taking responsibility. More people were becoming involved in committees and doing jobs in the church. One woman got involved in the floral arrangements in the church. Sometimes we worked together and we created quite interesting things. It wasn't just about a bunch of flowers, it was her introduction to the working life of the church and we were getting to know each other better. Her husband was the Junior Church leader. I was never altogether happy with what was going on in the Junior Church. He had not been sympathetic at the beginning and so I didn't feel I could tackle the Junior Church issues. I let them ride a little even though that was an area in which I had contributions to make from my teaching background and my experience as a national training officer involved in youth work.

A situation arose which I think was a turning point in my relationship with him. A Church Worker had been appointed to take on some of the pastoral visiting. The appointment was causing some difficulties. He was making demands in terms of wanting extra finance for travel and other expenses. We simply couldn't afford to give him extra money. Also he was setting himself up a little bit in opposition to me. And he was coming across to some of the people who were creating the difficulties as a very fine Christian and a great person. We had to deal with these matters. But it was a very delicate situation. Some of the people on the committee were very sympathetic to him, especially the older women who felt maternal towards him. It was another occasion for conflict within the committee. So I took the leader with me to interview the Church Worker in his house. We sorted out the problems quite successfully. Making an ally of him brought about a change in our relationship and in his attitude. Both he and his wife became key people. They have been very supportive of the new minister who followed me.

Seven years previously when I became the minister nobody was giving support to the minister, no matter who it might be. I left behind a little team of about ten or twelve committed people with a sense of responsibility for the whole church who wanted to encourage and to help the minister.

Those were big changes that went deep. Much of the work didn't change greatly. Youth organizations and the women's group continued. We worked through some difficulties in the women's group. That was part of the overall conflict, the personalities there were the same as in the Leaders' Meeting. Worship did change. I had to

back-track on some innovations and become much more traditional which was not my style but seemed to be appropriate. To re-assure them that there was a traditional side to my ministry I worked hard at my preaching because they set a high store on their minister being a good preacher. I think the quality of the worship was enhanced. A new organist came and we worked together on the music side and that again brought different people in.

From the beginning I felt there was no possibility of new growth until we had overcome the worst of the conflict. As I have said that took me three years. As the conflict quietened down development occurred. The courses I did at *Avec* and the consultancy help I received over that period was of critical importance. Without that kind of help I could not have worked through the conflict. The courses enabled me to study conflict theory which helped me to research my own conflict situation. Over and beyond all the academic and practical help I was supported by groups and by you through a very demanding time.

I have been using the *avec* approach for the best part of twenty years now, as a lay person and as a minister, in churches and in training courses I have helped to run. When I reflect on the effects I have a sense of satisfaction from feeling that I enabled people to do things for themselves and to make their own decisions: I didn't tell them what to do or rail-road them through things. There is some satisfaction from knowing that my observations and analysis show that there was development, whether or not the people recognise it as such. On the other hand there has been frustration at times. It is much easier to be the leader making the decisions. Although in some ways it is not my nature to do that, making decisions together has its own problems. It takes longer. More issues and views have to be considered. It is more difficult to put things into some order. Sometimes it is a struggle to stay with things that are key to the situation. Will we/they make the right decision? When you can't see your way through this process it is tempting to feel that it would be less painful to drift along with the congregation to avoid these problems. But at the end I would be very critical of myself if I had done that and not left the situation better than I found it.

To be honest, I have to say that this *avec* approach is a lot of damned hard work at times. It is very hard work because of what it involves: you are having to think hard about very important things; you are continually disciplining and training yourself to think more clearly about how things are going and why and how you and others are doing certain things and how they can be done better. Yet you have to be careful that you are not over critical of others in the situation or impatient with them if they are not keeping up with you or if they are doing things differently from the way you would like them to do them; you are never satisfied. When I am low I regret and possibly resent that development work is so hard. But I stay with it because underneath my beliefs and my theology say loud and clear that this approach is the right way to work with people in the Church and community. In fact my beliefs and my use of the *avec* approach have developed each other. My beliefs were there to begin with. Then this way of working and my practice shaped my beliefs as my beliefs in turn at various stages shaped my practice. I have tried to keep the two together in harmony. For example, the value that I believe God places on humankind as a whole and upon individuals indicated the ways in which I should relate to people; the *avec*

approach showed me how I could do that in the work of the Church. Therefore it helped me to model the nature of the Church in ways more in keeping with what Christ meant when he talked about the Kingdom of God.

What the *avec* approach does is to recognise the contribution that people have to make to their own development and every person has a contribution to make. Releasing everyone's contribution in a work situation has quite a powerful dynamic influence. Part of my vocation is to help that release to take place. I can get impatient at times when it doesn't happen and people just sit in a pew week by week looking at me and doing nothing else. Realising the potential to think and act leads to all kinds of development.

So this approach takes seriously the human and the spiritual factors. I think it has got to if we are talking about Christian thought and work because that is about relationships. It is about what Christ wants to do in the lives of people. It is about developing the spiritual lives of people as well as other things. And, as we are part of that ministry, any way in which we work has got to take account of people's humanity, their emotional responses and their spirituality. So you shouldn't put the *avec* approach on one side and the spiritual on the other. They are all bound up together. I try to get congregations and leaders to see that and not to feel that by thinking out what you should do you are not being properly spiritual. Some church people say, "What we should do is pray about it." The implication is that if we pray about it, we don't need to work at it. In fact we need to do both.

Over the years I have had many consultancy sessions with Avec staff. I attach very high importance to them. They make you sit down, think and analyse. They bring someone else's mind into the situation, someone who can be more objective: someone from outside, less prone to be coloured by your reading of the situation or your prejudices or your likes and dislikes. But someone who can understand and identify with the situation and accepts you and accepts that consultations are not just comfy conversations. They can be a challenge. At times things are said that you do not want to hear! But for me they have always been experiences of affirmation, and encouragement, seeing new possibilities, and confidence building.

These sessions work through exchanges of ideas until you come to a mutual understanding which opens up new possibilities for the consultor.

Confidential consultancy help has meant that things have worked out better for me than they would have done otherwise. At times, I could have been swamped by a situation and maybe I would have given up. I don't think I would have survived Brunswick without it. Maybe it would have broken me. As it was I gained the confidence to say, "Well, I will do what the Church has asked me to do, I won't give up on it." At critical points consultations have been escape routes, somewhere where you could open out a situation with somebody that you trusted. That was vital at various stages in Brunswick and in other situations. They helped me to order my work and to put my energies to best use. I can honestly say I didn't ever find a consultation a waste of time. Partly, I think, because consultants took feelings as seriously as everything else about your situation and thoughts. Possibilities were examined until one emerged which you felt you could handle.

Feelings colour how you respond and so it is important to sort them out. You may sit down and think the best way to relate to this person is by taking step one, two and three. Then, when you meet her/him it all goes out the window because of a certain look or a certain word. Consultancy sessions help you to prepare how to cope with those situations. Work consultancy is not just an analytical exercise setting things on paper, although it is that. It's about preparing people emotionally as well as intellectually to use their ideas whilst being open to their instincts. And, if things don't work out as sometimes happens, to change tack or think again.

I don't want to be arrogant and say this is the only way to work. At the same time it has proven itself in my experience and in the experience of others as well. I don't know of anyone who has tried to work this way who has then thrown all the ideas out and gone in a different direction. I'd like to see it more a part of congregational life so that ministers and people are able to look more critically at their work and to plan and shape it better. I'd like to see ministers being more aware of their need for this approach so that they don't just rely on their own instinctive abilities, important as they can be. I'd like to see the *avec* approach become much more a part of our basic training in ministry. But sometimes I don't know how we are ever going to get it into the whole system.

Observations and Impressions

Considerable emphasis must be placed upon developing churches and organizations and their work through, where necessary, getting those at the heart of them to change their attitudes, approaches and methods so that they are more effective in relation to their purposes and the people and situations in which they pursue them. This is right. It must be the first option of any development worker and the first phase of any human and spiritual development programme. It is key to the *avec* approach. Most of the stories in this chapter and this book illustrate this option being worked out effectively. But, no matter how carefully and skilfully a worker pursues this option, it does not always achieve the desired results. Key figures can prevent those changes being made which are necessary for the well-being of the church and those associated with it. The reasons and the methods vary enormously as does their culpability – so often they are the victims of experiences and systems that have deprived them and left them emotionally wounded.

The difficulties of promoting development are dramatically more complex in a situation where this first option is inoperable. Workers are faced with tortuous decisions. Should they let things drift and take their own course? If they do this the work of the church is seriously impaired and gradually contracts as people with much to offer leave in frustration. Or should they engineer a sweeping leadership re-shuffle? Christine was tempted to do this but put it on one side. I think she was well advised to do so. The emotion, conflict and faction engendered would most likely have left the situation unworkable. Having put both of these options to one side she pursued another one.

Three things underpinned the option she pursued: everyone must be ministered to; new leaders were needed because the existing ones could not be healed and trained for the tasks ahead; overall development would not occur until the conflict subsided. There were two main aspects to this option. First, she did not give up on

the old leaders. She worked very hard with them and at great personal cost even though she knew they could not exercise the leadership required. She helped them to work through their anger to a more equable state. That is development and thus a version of the first option. Second, she schooled people for leadership and waited for opportunities for them to be appointed democratically in ways and circumstances which would cause the least emotional backlash from the old leaders and therefore would enable them to be leaders.

This gradualistic, holistic approach worked. The first aspect took three years! No-one left the church in a community where it was normal to leave or cause faction when you did not get precisely what you wanted. A new leadership group was established and survived Christine's departure to be a vital resource for the next minister.

Christine Sales' story is a good example of developing a church through introducing new leaders without alienating or losing the old ones who could not rise to the demands of the office. This was no mean achievement given the intransigence of some of the leaders, their volatility and their emotional outbursts. The cost for this highly desirable development was enormous.

Chapter Four

CHANGES IN ORGANIZATIONS

Evidence is to be found throughout this book of practice changes in churches and organizations as well as in practitioners and people. This chapter concentrates on this kind of change. It contains stories of transforming change in a Roman Catholic association for profoundly deaf people and in a Roman Catholic travellers' "parish" which covered a large geographical area in the Republic of Ireland. It sketches out changes in the Methodist Church, Sierra Leone, in religious orders and in the Conference of Religious.



One:
THE CATHOLIC DEAF ASSOCIATION
Charles Hollywood

Charles Hollywood is a Roman Catholic priest in his mid-sixties. By any reckoning he is a charismatic figure in the world of Roman Catholic deaf people. No other person I know can communicate as freely, quickly and accurately as he can with deaf and deaf blind people. He has a rapport with them. His signs are elegantly economic in movement. His face speaks as he mouths words in perfect harmony and sympathy with his signs. He himself has a serious hearing problem.

In his own inimitable way he tells how he came to discover this. It was whilst he was training for the priesthood in Maynooth. Seminarians used any ruse and excuse to get a trip into town. One afternoon he was idly dangling his pocket watch first by one and then the other ear when he realised he could not hear it through one ear. Immediately in his impish way he saw this to be an unusual way of getting a trip into town and a visit to the cinema on the pretext of seeing a specialist. The doctor told him the devastating news that the condition was chronic and he would become completely deaf. Charles begged him not to tell the Rector. When he returned, however, the Rector knew and said he would have to leave the seminary. Charles begged to be allowed to stay. Eventually the Rector reluctantly agreed but only on the condition

that Charles got a bishop to promise to ordain him in full knowledge of the prognosis. After some searching the bishop of Salford agreed to ordain him on condition that he dedicate himself to ministering to deaf people.

That is what happened and from small beginnings in central Manchester he, with others, have built up a remarkable national network of facilities for deaf people and formed the Roman Catholic Association for the Deaf. Now he is the secretary to an international organization for deaf people.

Charles tells the story of Avec's involvement but not in a sequential manner. I have done that in my observations at the end of this section.

Just a note on terminology. Charles and those in the Association speak of "the deaf", "the deaf mind", "deaf communities". I understand that there is a contemporary preference to speak of "deaf people" or "people who are deaf". Some of his uses I have left because they are so much part of him, others I have changed.

Charles Hollywood's Reflections, April 1994

In the late 60's and early 70's a number of us working with the Catholic deaf were doing courses. We wanted to do a better job and to be more effective pastorally. Also, we were looking for qualifications which would enable us to work in partnership with local authorities. So the training was as much about status as expertise. Local authorities had a responsibility to provide services for the deaf, directly or through voluntary organizations. At that time no Catholic agency had any financial help from a local authority. We couldn't provide the services we wanted to without it because the Catholic Church had no funds earmarked for them. We needed social work qualifications to get established, to get finance and to build up a service. Several of us got them. When I was training, the focus was on one-to-one casework. A course one of our Sisters took later, emphasised group and community work. Through that we learnt about Avec.

I was the fall guy who was sent by our Catholic Deaf Association to test out what Avec had to offer us. As far as the Church was concerned we were not long out of the second Vatican Council. The emphasis in the Catholic Church was on the church as community, as the people of God on a journey together. Previously there had been a kind of individualism, religion was about saving souls. Each of us were deeply involved with the deaf individually, but it was the community development aspect that I was particularly interested in. We wanted a model for developing deaf services and centres in different places. So Avec seemed to have something to offer.

For the first time, through that course in 1976, I was able to conceptualise my whole work situation. I had never ever done what I had to do to go on that course: sit down and write all the things that were happening in my situation and what I thought and felt about them. Producing that preliminary paper was a wonderful exercise. It gave a totally different slant to the whole job. I came to that course not having a very clear idea about the job that I was expected to do. I went back home after only ten days with a clear picture of my situation and models and procedures to tackle problems. I might not have got the whole story but I got enough to do my own job far better and to help others to do their job too. It taught me how to conceptualise,

model and analyse human situations and to focus on the primary things that have to be done. That is very important. In college we did not have training of that kind at all. I did seven years training. It was about philosophy, theology, scripture and history but it wasn't about any of these other things, about pastoral management if you like.

At that time I was running Hensy House, a residential home for deaf people in Moss Side, Manchester. Father Terry O'Meara had just joined me. We lived in Hensy House as did four Sisters of Our Lady of Evron. As a direct follow-on to what I had done on the course I got the Sisters and Father Terry together. I told them about the course and an idea for an exercise we could do which I'd got from the work paper sessions. We got a blackboard and put up every single thing that had to be done in Hensy House - answering the phone, putting out the milk bottles, dealing with the deaf people who came in, "signing" (i.e. communicating and translating through sign language), sacraments, weddings, instructions. Everything was thrown at the board and written down. So we were putting together a picture of the whole situation. Then we put all the similar things together in circles. Eventually we gave the circles titles. I can't remember all of them but one was "administration", another "pastoral", and one was "educational". By now we had a clear vision of what had to be done.

Then I said, "Nobody outside this room is going to do this work. We have got to do it ourselves. What of all this do you feel you would be able to accept as your responsibility? We'll all give a hand but each one must accept some kind of responsibility for the totality." Each person chose one of the circles of responsibility. I had the last choice, I was the sweeper, whatever was left over was mine. Sister Maria would do the social work. A major thing that emerged was that Father Terry, only eighteen months ordained, a young priest, decided that he would like to have a go at the administration. Up to then I had been responsible for administration. It was utterly chaotic. I couldn't cope. I did the field work all right and visiting deaf people and coping with their individual problems. I could do all that but I did not make notes about the money, where it came from, where it was spent. I had unanswered letters from the Income Tax and from the Registrar of "Unfriendly" Societies. It was just a mess. In allowing Terry to do this we were going against tradition, it wouldn't have been done anywhere else in the Diocese. The pattern was that the young priests were out knocking on doors and visiting the people. They never knew how much money was coming in and going out. Rarely would they have seen financial statements. But Terry, a young priest, had full charge of the administration and the finance.

If I had not gone on that course I don't think I would have had the courage to have allowed him to do that because it was breaking with all the traditions and all the wisdom. But, I saw it as part of a development process. It was enabling other people to do what they could do. It was using the resources that were there. It was allowing all the individuals to develop themselves through exercising responsibility.

Everyone felt a deep sense of involvement, ownership and responsibility. Before, if anything went wrong I was the fall guy, I was the one that had to provide the answer. For the future, the answers were going to come from each of us in their own area but we were all in it together. Nobody was left on their own. We were all working together as a team.

I suppose if I were totally honest I felt that I might be on a bit of a hiding to nothing. If it had all gone wrong I would have had to sweep up the pieces. At the same time I felt a great sense of freedom I didn't have before. A freedom to get on with the things that I felt were central to the agency out there and I was able to do that. Within one year we had, for the first time in all the years that I had been there, audited accounts on time. And having audited accounts, we could apply for grant aid. There were other administrative problems related to premises for our growing services. We had a residential home, Henesy House, in Sale and a combined hostel and deaf club in the centre of Manchester. Also we had acquired a property in Moss Side in which to locate all our services and resources. For a time we were working on all three sites as we de-commissioned the first two and commissioned the third as the new Henesy House. When this nightmare was over, Terry O'Meara took overall responsibility for putting a new storey on the new Henesy House.

For the first time we had a solid administrative system housed in one place. And Terry O'Meara is still here nearly twenty years later as Director of the whole Deaf Service and he has master-minded the building of this one and half million pound international Residential and Social Work Centre for deaf work and linked it in with four inner-city parishes of which he has become parish priest.

I have never regretted what we did that night. In fact it was the best thing that ever happened, undoubtedly so. It worked marvellously well and still does. Most of the original team members are still here. From that small beginning we have gone from strength to strength.

Using this *avec* approach has made a big difference in the ways in which people who are profoundly deaf and those who are hearing work together in what we now call the Catholic Deaf Association. I can illustrate it through two conferences, both held after Easter this year, one in Spain and one in Liverpool. The Spanish one was a traditional conference. Eighty people from nineteen countries attended it. Only twelve of them were deaf people. They communicated only by sign language. Their speech would be understandable but it wouldn't be their best means of communication. There were at least five, maybe more, sign language systems going on all the time besides four spoken languages. It was your traditional kind of conference. Twenty papers presented all by people with hearing and speech. We broke up for individual discussions about the papers and reported back at each session. People who were deaf had to work hard to participate and it was very expensive.

The Liverpool conference was the Association's annual event. Over two hundred people were present. Possibly two thirds would have been deaf. Deaf people from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and from every Roman Catholic Diocese in England. The focus was on the deaf. No papers were given. The theme was, "Water for Life". The whole conference was a process, an experience if you like, in which everybody was involved. It was the pattern that Avec started in 1978. We've used that pattern ever since.

At some of those annual conferences there would have been presentations given by deaf people. I'm talking in this instance about people who cannot speak at all and who would have critical difficulties coping with the English language. Deaf language

isn't just English in sign language. It is a visual gestural language. It is like painting a picture, rather than telling a story. I illustrate this by the way you would paint a picture of a small white house on top of the hill. First you would paint the hill, then you would paint the little house, then you would colour the house. The sign language follows that sequence: There is a hill. On top of the hill there is a house. The house is small. The house is white. Putting that into spoken English, "There is a hill and on top of the hill there is a house and the house is small and white." That gives some idea of the complexities of deaf and hearing people using these different languages in shared conferences.

Now, if a deaf person from here was going to present a paper, a group of a dozen of us, deaf people with one or two hearing people, would get together. First we would put the subject on a blackboard or flip chart and discuss what the conference is about. Say it was "Water for Life". Then we would get them to say how they felt about it. What does it mean to you? Everybody has their say. People are assisted to clarify their points. All the contributions are written down on the board or whatever. That's very much like what we did with the staff team after I had been on the Avec course.

During the week I would work on the material, not to change it, but to put it into a logical kind of order that would help us to take the next step. It would be typed out and each person would have a copy. The next meeting would start with those notes. They would be discussed until we got all round agreement. Then we would add and develop points. We could meet as many as eight or ten times before the group's paper was produced. Having got the subject matter we turned our attention to the deaf person who was going to present it to the Conference. Gerry Hanifin presented one paper. He is a very humorous fellow. We'd pick out a few "visual jokes" and see if the rest of the members were able to appreciate the humour in these particular things. Then we'd complete the text with a few little jokes shoved into it. (Verbal jokes which are a play on words are lost on born-deaf people.) Gerry, or whoever was selected to give the paper, would go home and practise signing it. Then they would give that in deaf sign language. That has become the traditional form of our conferences, talks given by the deaf themselves, in a form that the deaf people would be able to understand rather than them being given as a hearing person would understand. Papers were written by deaf people with the help of hearing people for deaf and hearing people who had sign language. They would also be translated into the spoken word – the reverse of what normally happens.

When a person who had never in his lifetime given a public talk goes to a conference and gives one to two hundred people he's never the same person ever again. They grow, become adult, they have a story to tell. They have status.

It all started in 1978. Up to then our conferences had been run in a traditional way by hearing people. We asked Avec staff to help us run a conference which would get the deaf participating more fully in the discussions. We wanted hearing people to work *with* deaf people rather than *for* them. All kinds of people were involved: deaf people and parents of deaf people; teachers of the deaf, chaplains to the deaf; hearing people; there were well educated people as well as people with no education at all and so on; some people had no speech and others were very eloquent. Problem solving sequences were used in sub-groups. People role played situations such as the difficulty

of confidentiality because sign language can be read across the room. Avec helped us run two conferences, in 1978 and 1979 to get the hang of it. Since then we have run them ourselves and developed the process considerably. Now, sixteen years on, deaf people play a major part in organizing and running the Association's annual conferences. That is a world away from the international conference in Spain.

An event in the 1979 conference illustrates the changes taking place. Deaf and hearing people were leading from the platform. At one point deaf people said to the hearing people, "You are going too fast, speak slowly." The hearing people began to speak a bit more slowly. A bit later on the hearing people said to the people who were signing, "Go more slowly, we can't keep up with you." That was a great equaliser. Another thing which illustrates how things changed was discussions about the title. The original one was "The Association for the Catholic Deaf of Great Britain and Ireland." In recent years since we've really got into this *avec* way of working there has been a constant pressure to get rid of "for". Now it is known as the Catholic Deaf Association, the CDA. Getting rid of "for" avoids the patronage in the message it conveys to people outside of doing things *for* deaf people. It was some of the deaf people who insisted that we use this new title. It is their association. For legal purposes we have the title we started off with. It's going to cost us a bucket of money to change the title. Many deaf people would not see the significance of the change. But my understanding is that it is an outworking of the idea of hearing and deaf working with each other on an equal basis. Certainly that is why the old hands were prepared to go along with the change.

There was a shadow side to changing the way we worked in the Association. It was a democratic organization and the members came together regularly for meetings. Most, but not all of them, were hearing people. A small group of us were at the heart of the Association. We met informally, kept things going, promoted new initiatives and, I believe, we gave a prophetic lead to the Association and its work. We were known as the "kitchen cabinet".

Then came the consultation for all the full-time workers in the Association from all over the country. It was a fourteen-day residential work study consultation led by Avec staff based on the ten-day course model. Each person presented a work paper about their situation. We studied them in turn in a series of work paper sessions. Then we considered the work of the Association as a whole. There was a lot of commitment to the idea of working with people, being non-directive, consulting and sharing in decision making. One person felt the kitchen cabinet didn't fit into all that. Others agreed. It was scuttled, sunk in just one flash. It went up in smoke or down in flames. That was devastating for a while but you know we lived with it. Now we were into consulting with hearing and deaf people. It takes a long time to do that especially with deaf people. There was a leadership vacuum. I believe some people found it difficult to get on with things because they were afraid of treading on other people's toes. And some were finding it more difficult to be creative on their own because they had got used to doing it with others. It was obviously difficult to cope with, but we did. We were faithful to the principle of working with people. For a time there was a genuine loss. There was a new management model. We went at a much slower pace but I think there were more happy passengers on board.

So Avec greatly affected the way we did things in Henesy House and in the Association. It also brought the Association and particularly the full-time diocesan workers to the point where theology had begun to matter. That was important. Unless pastoral practice is built on sound theology it is not sound pastoral practice. There are loads of things that you can achieve on a purely material level where the real roots don't matter too much. But I am talking about a depth that affected one's prayer as well as one's action.

Do you remember when we tried to produce a policy document for the Association? You'll never forget that! I strongly suspect that some of us didn't fully understand what we were trying to do. Eventually we did produce the document and it was agreed. Quite honestly I believe that it has never seen the light of day since we finished it. But it made us struggle, differ and argue about important issues. That was the lasting value of the exercise.

One of the ideas that came up in an early discussion paper was the importance of individual workers being free to do what they wanted in their own dioceses. But the word that I and others wanted to use for the Association was "interdependent". Interdependence, the very gift that we had been handed by Avec, was in danger of being tossed out by an individualistic approach.

In the early '60s I used to go into another area which belonged to a neighbouring diocese to visit the deaf people. Now if I wanted to hear the confessions of those deaf people, I had to get the permission from the bishop of that area. Without that, according to our theology, I couldn't give a valid absolution to deaf people who lived a couple of miles down the road who were asking me to hear their confessions and give them absolution. I could not have done that without a certificate or permission from the bishop who lived a very long way off. Years afterwards a man who was this bishop's secretary at the time told me that a very senior official in the bishop's office was asking, "Who is this guy that is coming into our diocese and wanting faculties to hear confessions?" Now it wasn't for another twenty years after that that the diocese began to provide its own service for the deaf. But you see this was the thing about independence. This official resented somebody from another diocese coming into his diocese. That was the official position according to Canon Law. That kind of thing was something that we were bursting to get away from. The interdependence which Vatican Two seemed to be promoting was being denied by this idea of independence. It was going against a whole theological movement within the church as well as the changes in the Association. We were struggling from our own individualism to begin to measure up to the people of God concept which came out of the Vatican Council. Twenty years on, the synod of bishops which met to assess the value of what came out of Vatican Two said that it had expressed one of the primary concepts of the Church, a close personal communion with and concern for each other, the fellowship and sharing. The Greek for it is *koinonia*.

For me it was all about our spirituality. It's the mental framework. An important part of our Catholic spirituality is that we are members of a mystical body. All who share in the body and blood of Christ are brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit. Through participation in the eucharist the relationship between people is like

a mystical marriage, not just two becoming one flesh but all becoming one flesh in community. So, in a sense, we do belong to each other. We are interdependent.

Another issue was about where the relationship was between the Church and the communities of deaf people we were building up all over the country. These were communities in centres with services for the deaf. They met social, welfare and spiritual needs. Mass was said in them. They were parishes for the deaf. At one point, in the Westminster Diocese especially, there was much talk about the parishes rather than centres meeting the needs of deaf people. A sort of parish community provision for deaf people. Parishes should not ignore the deaf, they have important contributions to make. But there is no way in the world that a parish can meet the needs of deaf people totally. Certainly it cannot provide what the Association is providing. Within the deaf clubs and through the community services people are able to develop.

Earlier I talked about Gerry Hanifin giving a talk to a group of 200 people from all over the country. Gerry is now teaching sign language in a Deaf School and also appearing on television in a deaf comedians' team. It all started for him in one of our centres and then at that conference. But for that, it would never have happened.

Some people were saying that communities of deaf people like Henesy House were "alternative" churches. One person who held high office in the Association said that there could not be a "deaf church", deaf people became part of the Church through active involvement in parishes. But for me deaf communities were authentic church in their own right.

In some senses I saw the Association as an expression of Church. In Catholic theology Church is an expression, a manifestation of what we call the mystical body of Christ. Everything we did was built around the eucharist. We had our eucharist together at all our meetings. The underlying theology was, there's no church without eucharist and no eucharist without church. The eucharist prayer expresses what I'm getting at: "May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ, be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit." Centres and services for the deaf are Church. Avec courses were similar. Everything that was done was always done in the spirit of prayer, regard and loving care. God was there. I believe the Holy Spirit had a large hand in all this.

There was another thing that happened. The attempt to carry us all along together I think muted the genuine prophetic voice of the Association. I was helped to see what was happening through Avery Dulles' description of different models of the Church. He describes the Church as institution, mystical communion, herald, servant and sacrament. Those models only grasp part of what the Church is about. Much of what we did with Avec was about the Church as an institution. But it must be the other things as well. It must be a herald, it must proclaim the word of God. But if there is an over-emphasis on one model to the detriment of others you are going to get things wrong. And in some senses I have a little bit of a feeling that points to a problem that we had in coping with the community development and the *avec* process.

As I see it the herald as the prophetic side suffered a little bit. Take the policy document I've already mentioned. We arrived at a statement of what the group of workers thought. We didn't arrive at an inspirational document. It was almost like

the agreed statements between Anglicans and Catholics. Both can read them and see two different pictures and say, "Yes, we agree," but both of them have different stories. The policy document was a dead duck. It was wrung dry of any kind of inspiration. It certainly wasn't a prophetic document. It had to be what it was, we had to slug it out, you know, we were stripped to the waist and the gloves were off.

But let me say, we didn't get too much about the theory underpinning this method of community development even in those additional short courses. We didn't do the diploma course or a degree. We simply got the bones of the process and, as I said earlier on, many of us probably got the wrong end of the stick quite often. So, not surprisingly we were in some danger of neglecting the prophetic voice, yes, and other elements too.

Let me say that I never have regretted any of this. I think it was one of the greatest things that happened to me/us in terms of giving us the tools to do the job that we wanted to do and that had to be done at that time. The national scene has been transformed for the deaf. There is only one diocese in the whole country that doesn't now have some form of service. The interdependence is very much there; we are working together and the practice of working *with* deaf people is very much at the heart of what we are trying to do.

And I trace all this back to Avec. We had no other in-put apart from what we got from Avec. I didn't get it from anywhere else. I didn't go on any management courses or anything like that. All the things I have done go back to the first course. They coloured the whole approach to my job and to my vocation. I don't think I have ever since then been overcome by any pastoral situation because I had the means of looking at the problem objectively and trying to do something about it. It would have been impossible for Terry to do the things that he has done if I hadn't had the *avec* approach. Some of my priestly friends would have accused me of taking the easy option by getting somebody to do the work, sitting back and taking the applause. But it wasn't about that. The *avec* approach enabled us to focus on development. Terry helps me. I help Terry. We help each other. It's almost the notion of praxis, you do things and you reflect on them and you take a step onward and reflect on it again. This reflecting we do with each other enables each of us to do more. That was what we needed. Other people were writing about the theology of this approach in those times, and you were doing it. And you were doing a very very vital bit at a time when we needed it enormously. You were showing a profound respect for people, respecting their views, enabling them to articulate issues and ideas about which they were stuttering and stammering and struggling. Avec staff had the heart and the head to stay with us and to enable us.

Observations and Impressions

One of the impressive things about this story is the nature of the collective approach to making fundamental changes in the way in which deaf and hearing worked together in their Association and to the work culture of their organization. A brief statement of the process helps to understand how the developments occurred. In 1976 the Council sent Charles Hollywood to sample the *avec* approach. Concluding that it was relevant they negotiated a two-year project (1976-78) which involved introducing eighteen full-time diocesan workers to the *avec* approach through a

ten-day course and a two-day seminar and then some two hundred deaf and hearing people through their annual conference. That was from 1976-78. Avec staff were then asked to help the Association to get hearing and deaf people working with each other in conducting the 1979 conference. From 1979-80 there was an extended review of the work of the Association, the use of the *avec* approach, what had happened, consideration of underlying theoretical and theological issues and the drafting of a policy paper. During the early '80's the Association ensured that all their workers had Avec training. In 1989 I was engaged in a consultation about building a new Hensy House, uniting it with parish work and making it an international centre for work with deaf people.

The dynamics of this are very different from that of one or two people being inducted into the *avec* approach using it to transform their own work and that of their organization. Precisely what is involved in adopting the approach is considered by each person in relation to their own work with the help and support of their colleagues. At the same time they are working at the implications for the organization as a whole. Working at things from these different individual and collective perspectives is uniquely creative. It embodies the approach at greater depths in the members and the whole. People reinforce and support one another through mutual learning. Reflective practitioners and reflective communities are developed concurrently – and the one needs the other. These are real benefits even though the practitioners and people are variously committed to the approach and practising it.

Charles Hollywood illustrates the importance when changing practices of attending to the revision of theories and beliefs so that they are all of a piece. If this is not done there is a superficiality in the new practice which could adversely affect the quality of relationships. It could even appear gimmicky. It is interesting to see that, because people agreed with the changes in practice from different theological positions, the theoretical conflict lagged behind the introduction of changes and was more difficult to resolve. In part this is because changes in practice raise personal issues additional to those related to acquiring new skills. For instance, the question of independence is not simply an academic issue. It touches deep seated psycho-spiritual nerves about personal territory and work boundaries of freedom, responsibility and accountability. Working through these issues can be tricky in relation to oneself and others. This is indicated by this extract from the 1979 review by the Association.

Some people in some instances over-reacted against taking necessary directive action which has resulted in "unsanctified permissiveness".

Some people in some situations find it more difficult to get on with what they see needs to be done because: they are afraid of "trampling on other people's toes"; they see the value of consultation but for one reason or another are not able to undertake it; they are afraid of not taking other people with them; the situation has not only become more complex, but it is now seen to be so.

Some people are finding it more difficult to think creatively on their own and separately in relation to concerns of the Association as a whole. (People have become somewhat suspicious of private thinking. The valuable functions previously performed by the "kitchen cabinet" are not being done.)

Some have become more secretive.

This was under the title of "changes for the worse" and sandwiched between "changed for the good" and "areas of no change which are of concern". Overall the change was for the better and action was taken to overcome the problems. This extract indicates things which frequently have to be worked through in introducing non-directive ways of working.

As I recall it there were two principal difficulties in getting members of the Association to formulate a policy statement. The first was to get them to see that there are significant differences between purposes and plans of action. The second difficulty was that the argument about the respective parts that parishes and centres could play in meeting the needs of deaf people was in full force. A policy statement that included both approaches was seen as selling the pass or fudging the issues. Making a mission statement might have been more effective, but that idea was yet to be born!

Charles Hollywood illustrates vividly the profound and far-reaching effects of a comparatively short experiential introduction of an organization to the *avec* approach. Adopting the non-directive approach was pragmatic and prophetic.



Two:
THE METHODIST CHURCH, SIERRA LEONE
Nelson Charles and S. Dowridge-Williams

Control of the work of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone remained firmly in the hands of the British Conference until 1967. In that year it became an autonomous Church. A dependent district became an independent Church. During the early 80's the Methodist Church Overseas Division was concerned to move the relationship with overseas churches on to a deeper level where dependency and independency gave way to interdependence and mutuality. The need to take some initiatives was felt keenly by the staff of the Methodist Church Overseas Division. The idea of consultations with West African Churches emerged. I was asked to design and lead them. The first was in Sierra Leone in 1984, the second in Ghana in 1985 and the third in Nigeria in 1986. They were entitled "Relationships in Mission".

In this section, we have two quite separate views of the consultation in Sierra Leone. The first is by The Revd Nelson Charles. He was the President of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone during the time of the consultation. He is now a

supernumerary minister living in South London. I interviewed him at his home. The Revd S. Dowridge-Williams was a member of the consultation. He succeeded The Revd Nelson Charles as the President. In that capacity he was a representative to the British Methodist Conference in Leeds in 1994. It was there that I interviewed him. Both interviews were just ten years after the event.

The consultation enabled a group from Sierra Leone and one from the United Kingdom to confer for six days. Ivy McGhie, Leslie Griffiths and I acted as facilitators. Each group in turn profiled the life and work of their churches. Together they established the work that they were going to do during the consultation. Detailed work was done in task groups on finance and other resources; giving and receiving in Christ; development and growth of the Church. The work of each group was discussed in plenary sessions. Papers were prepared. Members of the consultation then reflected on the implications and planned how to follow through their conclusions. A report was prepared and agreed by the members before they departed.¹

Nelson Charles' Reflections, May 1994

Some of us in Freetown felt that there had not been adequate preparation for us to become an autonomous Church. We wanted autonomy but it was not very comfortable nor convenient. For one thing we were not self-supporting. Churches in the provinces were being largely supported by the Overseas Division of the Methodist Church. Autonomy meant that that support was going to wither away gradually. We were told that the consultation could go into all such matters. So we looked forward very much to it.

The consultation was an eye-opener. First of all it was an opportunity to learn more about the British Methodist Church and how it related to other Methodist Churches in the world. We had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Methodist Church in the United Kingdom. We felt more closely linked because of that consultation. That enabled us to air our views and grievances. On that basis I think the consultation was a good thing. One thing that came out of our discussions was that the people from Britain did not really know about Sierra Leone and our church life. They were surprised that in Freetown we used the same hymn books that are used in Britain and our services are conducted in English. That goes back to 1792. The slaves who were freed and made citizens of Freetown could only speak to each other in pidgin or broken English. They were not all taken into slavery from the same part of the west coast of Africa. Some were taken from Nigeria and the Gold Coast, now Ghana. When the next generation were set free they had lost their language with everything else.

The attitude of the people in Freetown towards the Church is not the same as the attitude of the people in the provinces. After about an hour's drive from Freetown you are in a different country. The language changes, the lifestyle and customs change, everything changes. They have developed unimpeded because they were "protectorate people".

¹ An account of the consultation was published in the *Epworth Review*, Volume 15:2, May 1988: "Relationships in Mission" by Leslie Griffiths.

Then, speaking on behalf of those who attended the consultation from Sierra Leone, I can say that they were happy as well because to them it was as though British Methodism had not until that time learned the details of the problems of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone.

Another positive thing that came out of the consultation was a better understanding about the financial aspects of the church. It was not now just a question of the Methodist Church Overseas Division saying, "Let us give X pounds to the church in Sierra as a block grant to use as they decide." Through that consultation people from Britain got a better understanding of the financial help that we needed for this and that and why we needed it. And we knew that they understood. That was very important to us and to them. So, for instance, everyone knew why we needed a Land Rover to travel from Freetown to Tikonko because of the distance, the condition of the roads and so on. They knew about the Segbwema Hospital and the mobile clinic's van which serves many Mendi villages. So there was a better understanding on all sides about what was going on and what was required. And there was something on paper about it all.

As a result of all this, the Overseas Division began to specify grants that they gave us. For instance, we had what we called block grants which covered the stipends of missionaries and for things like education or hospital work. Then we had other grants specified for particular projects such as an agricultural extension project at Tikonko. Farmers came to that centre, they were taught modern methods of sowing and planting and ploughing and then they were given some help either by way of seeds or money and sent back to their farms to put into practice what they had learnt. A missionary called Bob Dixon managed the project. He introduced the ox plough. As a result of the consultation our grants were increased and classified. And, we had more of a say in the decision. There was much more consultation. We had to prepare a statement of our needs and send them to the Overseas Division. They would ask questions about this, that and the other. And we would explain. At the end we had an agreed amount. Then it was suggested that we could send a representative to London to share in the meetings when grants were apportioned to autonomous churches in order that we could go into the Division's resources and ours and see the fairness of what was being done. I remember looking forward very much to that. All this meant that there was more of a partnership between us. That did a lot for us. We felt more equal and responsible and more in control of our own affairs.

I've been reflecting on what made the consultation so effective. One thing was that those of us who represented the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone at that consultation came from different parts of the Church and the country to learn from each other. We weren't all from Freetown or the Methodist headquarters. I was the President. District Chairmen were there but the Secretary of the Conference wasn't. There was a university lecturer but about half of them were from the provinces and some were very young. Some had been to college, others had hardly any education at all. So we were a more representative group than we would normally have been. You asked for that when you were setting up the consultation. And the team from Britain was representative in a similar way. You knew your own stuff about British Methodism so that we were able to learn from each other.

None of us had ever experienced anything like that before. It was very different from a conference where a few people gave lectures or talks. If you remember some of our friends who came from provincial churches were not as outspoken as others. They were thrown by your questions. They wondered, "Well now, these British people, what have they come to do?" They were bemused at first but as the consultation developed one day after another and they got to follow-up the discussion they knew that the aim was beneficial to the local church and they became more interested and participated more. All of us gained a lot of confidence.

The diagrams you drew helped everyone to participate. You mapped out things so that we could see them. Those diagrams dramatized situations and showed how things worked, for instance, the flow of support or the action for mission and the response to it. They gave a three dimensional approach. We weren't just using words, spoken or written. We could see things as objects. That was very helpful. It helped us to listen, to see things, to ask questions and to understand – and to know that others understood or didn't. It was all so very different and better than anything we had known before.

Everybody had copies of all the papers for instance, and helped to prepare them. I remember an older fellow saying to me once, "You know long ago we never used to have papers when we went to Synod. It was only the white missionaries who had a piece of paper in their hands who knew what was happening. We just went and sat down there and when they said, 'Do you agree?' we all said, as a matter of course, 'Yes, we agree.' Things are happening differently now and we are glad."

And we wrote our own report whilst we were there. Everybody in that consultation helped to put things on paper and then we agreed it before we left. So we had a report that all parties had agreed to. It was a lot of work. Then there was all the preparation. It was hard work. I used to wonder whether you had had enough sleep, so much preparation was done overnight for the next day's work. But that preparation was vital.

Afterwards, I prepared a report of the consultation which I sent round all the circuits in Freetown and to the provincial Synods so that they would know about it and what was happening. The general view was that it was a good thing.

The consultation lived up to its title, "Relationships in Mission". Already I have shown how it improved our relationships over money. For some time there had been discussions between churches in different countries about partnership in world mission. The idea was that Churches in any country could send missionaries, not just countries like Britain. As a direct result of that consultation I was asked as President to talk to the ministers in the Sierra Leone Methodist Church and to encourage those who were interested to apply for service in World Mission. I did that gladly. So that was something else that came on the relationship side. That was a big change. It was now clear to us that the British Church is not only a church that sends missionaries, it is one that receives them as well. As we say, it was a "sending and a receiving church". It was two-way. At last there was more of an equality in mission. There was in fact a partnership in mission. That was very important. I felt good about that.

When I became President of the Methodist Church Sierra Leone, I decided to do all I could to develop training for all kinds of people in every aspect of work, ministry and mission. New short courses were organized for lay leaders at training centres at Segbwema and Tikonko and in Freetown. The Theological Hall and Church Training Centre had an extension programme and ran courses for local preachers and ministerial students. Fourah Bay College had a theology degree course. Post-ordination training was introduced and a programme to enable people to do post-graduate studies abroad.

During the consultation, careful consideration was given to the training of ministers and people in general for work in the church. That gave a new fillip to training. Since that time two of our ministers have been to Britain to study in Belfast. One then went to Cambridge and got his doctorate there. Now he is back in Sierra Leone as a minister. This coming September he is going to be principal of our ecumenical theological training college in Sierra Leone which now has an extension programme.

Decisions were made at the consultation about a training programme in giving and receiving and two people from the British Methodist Church and two from Sierra Leone organized material for courses in both countries.

Training has gone on. As recently as 1992, a lady from the conference office went to Pitmans college in Britain. Having finished her course she is back working at the conference office. So you see training went on apace. I put very high priority on training and education. The consultation was educative. It gave a push to these things. We ourselves used the same methods in a consultation on worship. People were encouraged to say anything they thought was either right or wrong about their worship and any changes that they wanted to see made. They would say for instance, "Well, in the evening service, five, six people only come and we have to pay the electric light bills and this and that. I think if people can't come to church in the evening we will have to call off the service and so on." There was a free expression of opinions and views. They had many things to say. Then we had one on the training of Sunday school teachers.

Getting youth leaders to come to a training course is very difficult. Most come from the provinces. Cost and transport are problems. Those who are able to pay their way may not have transport. One of our missionaries was doing a good job because he had a Land Rover and he could go to these villages and collect the young people and bring them to the meeting place. The meeting place was not always in Freetown, sometimes it was at Segbwema, we have a school there. When we got them together we did some good work. We used the same kind of methods. And since I left, I understand that the Women's Network in Freetown travel to the provinces, get the women together and have a wonderful time. Ordinary people respond very well indeed to these methods which get them to talk about things and to work things out for themselves. For them it is an opportunity to have their say. Some of them have been burning to say something for a long time. This consultation method gives them the opportunity. So they have always grabbed the opportunity whenever it is offered.

All this is appropriate because different sections of a community want to have their say. They are struggling to be involved in their own development programme.

Women want to do things in their own way, and of course we have had women in the ministry for some time now. Young people are very eager to assert themselves. The consultative method has done a lot to help people to be involved creatively. In my time we developed an Association of Methodist Youth Fellowships. They have national meetings of young people.

Ten years later I would say that that consultation helped the work of the church in my time. I would like to say that I did not look upon the consultation as a one-off event. I hoped that there would be more consultations however different they might be from the first. I could see them being instruments of policy formulation. They could enable us to air and thrash out difficulties and build up common understandings. Even if it met every ten years it could achieve much. Then you would be able to see what happened in relation to the decisions taken at the last one, how far were they implemented etc. They would help to develop relationships in mission between different Churches and different countries. That involves investing time, money and energy into thoroughgoing consultations in which you can really thrash things out and catch up with each other. They would see it as something that generates the life of mission in and between churches.

Alongside those consultations there could be ones between Methodist Churches in different political territories in West Africa. For instance, the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone could have consultations with those in Ghana and The Gambia. That is what I think should happen as a direct result of that consultation. West Africa churches in Ghana, Nigeria, The Gambia and Sierra Leone should have consultations to work at neighbourliness and to work at issues. They could present profiles of their churches to each other as we did. That would be background information. So though they have never been there they at least have a glimpse of what each other's churches are really like. That helps them to work together at whatever concerns them – mission, relationships, worship, money, training. A consultation can help Churches to determine not only what to do about those issues but who should do what.

S. Dowridge-Williams' Reflections, June 1994

The consultation between The Methodist Church Overseas Division and The Methodist Church Sierra Leone was timely. It was quite a new way of sharing. We hadn't had that kind of experience before 1984. It made us feel more equal even though Britain has more than we have – more people, human resources and money. There were several reasons for this. The British team was not condescending. The way the consultation was run meant there was honest sharing about matters relating to the life and witness of the church both in Britain and in my country. We believe that true motives of giving demonstrate an attitude of equality in the sight of God. Through that consultation we really came to be partners in mission. Two independent churches recognised their interdependence and worked out ways of building it up because we knew we needed each other. We really came to see and believe that in terms of service The Methodist Church Overseas Division needed us as much as we needed it. As partners in mission we had things to give and to receive from each other. Sharing of that kind had not been approached nor understood until the consultation. That established new confidence in us and between us.

"Giving and receiving" became a central theme of the consultation. The emphasis was upon people in both churches giving to and receiving from each other in every aspect of the mission and ministry of the church from education to evangelism. In the past it had been seen as Britain giving and Sierra Leone receiving. Giving and receiving if it is to be effective, we saw, has to be done in mutual and equal relationships rooted in Christian love and it involves doing things together in the fellowship of Christ and in the service of His Kingdom. It is an interrelationship in which both the giver and the receiver mutually enrich each other as each enables the other to grow in love. It is a relationship in which each person recognises and accepts the full humanity of the other person. This includes poor, handicapped and disabled people. Each person must be enabled by God's grace to give and to receive effectively in love. They must be trained to develop their own ability to give and be educated into an ability to receive. They need to experience that "it is more blessed to give than to receive". Giving and receiving should take place between individuals, in the local church and between churches at all levels.

All that fits well with our African beliefs. The consultation opened our eyes. We have an African proverb which says, "a hand goes, a hand comes". That is to say, you give and take. That is how life should be lived but my people didn't appreciate this for many years. 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 our people have grown over the years with that ideology which was not African. The consultation started to reverse all that.

Missionaries in the Colonial days behaved to our people as dictators. They told them what to do and the only education they gave them was the education that would keep them as catechists and local preachers and not to go above that. They were not thinking of training them as ministers. I remember the Revd J. R. S. Law who translated the Bible from English into Mende felt that the Mende man (sic) should never go above the standard of a local preacher. Just imagine that from 1811 to 1955 only three Mende people became ministers. It really spoilt our people. It closed their senses towards giving. It caused the dearth of ministers today. It was only after that consultation that we began to focus outside on the provinces to look at the Mende people, to accept them when they offered for the ministry and to give them the necessary training. The consultation came at a point when some of us from Freetown had received university education. We saw the need to train people for the best tomorrow so that they can be of most help to other people. Everyone, including the Mende people, needs to be educated to know that it is good to give as well as to receive. You can give your energy, your thinking, your self as well as your money. Our people need to be educated otherwise they cannot easily respond to what is important. The consultation helped us to a new understanding of the way in which the British Methodist Church had developed to the present standard. It didn't just happen as a bolt from the blue, it came gradually over a long period and through a lot of hard work.

Since the consultation, we have succeeded in educating our people about the need to give as well as to receive in relation to church work and financing it. The consultation

opened the eyes of our church congregations. They now know it is even more blessed to give than to receive. And we now see what we hadn't seen before, that it is our need and duty to walk towards self-sufficiency. Those are very big changes indeed. It didn't come automatically. We had to work at it hard for a long time. We had to get our congregations to see the weakness of depending upon the giving of other people. If they don't give then where are you? That kind of dependency is not good enough. God meant us to make our contributions.

What we did was to appoint two people, a man and a woman, to visit each Methodist church in Sierra Leone during worship time to talk to the congregation about the usefulness of giving and receiving. We drew up a big programme and recruited people we knew had enough experience and were sufficiently mature to do the job. The result is that giving has been increased in all the congregations.

Another thing we have done is to use the methods used at the consultation to promote church growth and development. Again people went to each church and spoke to leaders' meetings, congregations and youth rallies. They talked about the ideas that came out of the consultation about partnership in mission and the need for us all to work together. They said that now that we are an autonomous Church we need to be able to support ourselves and make our Church lively. We should not depend so much on outside resources as we used to do before. This is a new pattern. We can now be partners in mission, evangelism and giving, even though one partner is stronger than the other. We asked them to discuss these things. Leaders generally responded, giving the assurance that the Church will rise up to the request that has been made.

We recommended that church meetings form small groups to discuss what had been said. They did that and sent written statements into the Conference Office. They said that they were positive about the partnership ideas and that they would raise the money necessary for this policy. But they said they needed two things: accountability and transparency. In other words, if the people are to be properly involved in the Church in this new way as partners, they need to know how the money that they have given for the running of the headquarters is going to be used and then how it has been used. They want to really participate. They don't want to just raise money and give it to other people and that's the end of it. They want to know how it is spent. And they wanted to be involved in deciding how it is to be spent. That is our joy. You see they were happy because over the years they had grumbled, "All the time the Church is asking for money, asking for money. Well, we don't know to what use the money is put. So we will not give until we are involved."

So, through this consultation ten years ago, we have involved young people into the responsibility of the Church. They have a say in the life of the Church. They are the people who are now engineering the giving by the various societies. And I can tell you that as President I feel very happy because of the response that people have made. We were in fact feeling ashamed that for all these years Britain had been sending this and sending that. It had been sending missionaries and paying our own national ministers in the provinces. So after that consultation we began to see how we were a little bit lethargic. We decided that cannot continue. We must try harder ourselves, not just sit down and talk about things but we should think, talk and act.

Those programmes of education worked. The methods used at the consultation are guidelines for church growth and development. They have helped us to build up our congregations. We are only sorry that this rebel incursion had made nonsense of everything that we are doing. But we still hope that when it is over we shall begin again to review what we had gathered from the consultation.

Observations and Impressions

The duration of the face-to-face consultation was five concentrated working days from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Between days the staff worked hard as did some of the members. Preparing for the event took months. The consultative process was essentially simple. First the team from Sierra Leone presented a profile of their Church in context and their concerns until they were assured that the British team understood their situation and empathised with them. During this presentation no mention of any other church was permitted. Then the British team did the same. I am bound to say that the team from Sierra Leone were better at this than the one from Britain, whose members lapsed into making comparisons between the Churches in the two countries. The next stage in the process was the identification of the subjects on which they needed to work. They worked on them in sub-groups; they shared and edited the papers they produced; they reflected theologically on what had emerged and on the consultative process; they agreed a report which had been written as the consultation proceeded.

It is of telling importance that carrying out such a simple sequence could, in such a short time, produce transformational changes of the kind indicated by Nelson Charles and S. Dowridge-Williams. It was exhausting but the tiredness was suffused by deep satisfaction. The consultation induced changes in understanding and working practices and relationships in Sierra Leone and between the two national Churches. The consultation was creative beyond expectations. The method was refined and used to increasingly good effect in Ghana (1985) and Nigeria (1986).



Three:
A TRAVELLERS' PARISH
Sean Farrell

Father Sean Farrell is a religious, a member of the Order of St Vincent de Paul. Now in his late thirties, he is from a working class area in Dublin. He joined the Vincentian Community in his mid twenties after working in an office. During this period he was

heavily involved in adult clubs. He was appointed to work with Travellers in 1988. Soon after that he came into contact with Avec, took various courses and had consultancy sessions with my colleagues. In 1991 he joined the Avec/Roehampton Institute diploma course but had to withdraw part-way through the course to fulfil pastoral responsibilities to his family. Subsequently he has been on the staff of Avec courses in Ireland. He draws upon a rich experience of working with Travellers.

Quite exceptionally he was made parish priest of the Travellers' Parish in the Dublin Diocese in 1989, a year after being ordained priest. The "parish" covers the County and City of Dublin, nearly all County Wicklow and parts of Kildare, Wexford and Laois and has 700 Travelling families.

The Travellers, or travelling people, are an ethnic, nomadic people with very strong family ties. They live in a marginalised world in various types of accommodation: standard housing, group housing, official halting sites, and on the roadside. There are different levels of education among them depending on their lifestyle. They are a much maligned people, many of whose basic needs are not being met. They are discriminated against in relation to accommodation, health, education and social activities. They are unfairly treated by the State and by the settled community. Their life expectancy is fifty years and the infant mortality amongst them is three times higher than that of the settled community. They are among the most deprived group of people in Irish society. Archbishop Desmond Connell wrote in 1989:

The Dublin Archdiocese with its more than one million Catholics has 300 families living by the roadside, without electricity, water, sanitary or waste-disposal amenities which all of us take for granted in our daily lives. There are 1200 children now growing to maturity and few of them will see their fiftieth birthday. Because of their nomadic way of life they are feared by many and rejected by most communities... It is my hope that these words will help to initiate a new dialogue among people about our Christian duty to respect the basic human rights of Traveller families through suitable accommodation, adequate incomes, health care, education and employment. A particular right, arising from their own way of life, is the right to travel from one properly serviced site to another. I earnestly ask your wholehearted support for the provision of such sites for the Travelling people.

The Catholic Church responded to their need by appointing in 1980, Father Michael McCullagh as personal parish priest to Travellers in Dublin. The aim was: "In solidarity with Travellers to promote transformative interaction between Travellers and settled people in ways which are liberating for both."

Sean Farrell has enormous energy. He lacks any form of pretension. He gets on well and easily with all kinds of people. His work and his working relationships are informed by continually reading and studying. At the moment he is doing an extended course in authority, leadership and consultancy at the Tavistock Institute. He has the considerable facility of putting what he learns to good practical use. Currently he is the Novice Master for his Order and based in Mill Hill, London.

Sean Farrell's Reflections, April 1995

I joined the Travellers' Parish in 1988 as a temporary replacement for someone on sabbatical leave. The parish priest was ill and so I had a leadership role right from the beginning. I was made parish priest in 1989. I was only a year ordained so I'd not much experience in the ministry. I desperately wanted to stand back a bit and have a look at what was happening in the Parish and to see a way forward.

Soon after the Parish started in 1980 an Avec course helped the first priest, Michael McCullagh, to formulate the initial policy for the Parish. So from the beginning there was something on file about Avec. Michael got the Parish up and going and built up a team. He left in 1986.

Michael's successor did two Avec courses. But sabbaticals and illness meant that there was discontinuity and a leadership crisis. What Michael had created was beginning to wane. The structures he'd built up had not been maintained. In fact the thing was beginning to collapse. So I came in at a point of transition. Changes had to be made. The idea we had was of relocating the Parish. Relocating became an important word for us. Avec really helped me to think through what this meant and how to go about it. As a parish team we were in what I would now describe as a kind of surrogate relationship with a lay organization called the Government Committee of Travelling People. And we were in their premises, Exchange House, in Dublin. We didn't move too far away because we wanted to be in the same locality and keep up our working relationship, but we wanted our own premises. We called it St Lawrence House - St Lawrence is the principal saint of the Dublin Diocese. This name symbolised our Christian identity and that our ministry covered the whole of the diocese. It gave us a corporate Christian image. The move helped us to establish our autonomy and to do some thinking on our own rather than trying to do it all in an open committee. That was important. One of the things in moving out was that we wanted to set our own agenda. But we were nervous about it. I was only two years there. Some had been there longer and were embedded in the situation. They were a bit insecure about leaving the place. Avec really helped me to think that one through.

There were changes in our approach and basic structures. What Michael had set up had become reactive rather than proactive. We were always responding to the Travellers in terms of an awful lot of tragedies, one crisis after another.

I remember in an Avec work paper session on my situation saying, "The Parish was like a big ship moving along the water. Suddenly there was a man overboard. The whole ship was turning around in order to pick him up. Then the Parish ship got back on course again. Then somebody else was overboard and the whole ship turned around again." I got a new imagery through discussing that with the Avec work paper group. It was, "Let's keep the boat going and when somebody falls overboard let's lower a lifeboat to rescue them." So it wasn't just about changing from one building to another. It was about changing the direction of the parish.

Another big change was in the Team. When I went to the Parish it was a very clerical group of three Vincentians, two priests and a sister, and two secretaries. When I left in 1993 there was a team of twenty-eight. There were two priests, two

sisters, four lay catechists, twenty Travellers and two secretaries. Some of the Travellers were full- and some part-time members of the Team. They were funded by a government agency. We were all working together, *with* each other.

There were major stages in this enormous change. First we moved away from being a group of Vincentians running a parish to being a sponsoring group for the Parish Team. Then we changed from being a team of priests and religious to being a team of priests, religious and laity. Those changes caused all sorts of tensions. We, the Vincentians, were no longer in control. We no longer set the agenda. A lay agenda came in. A whole can of worms was opened up. Then the agenda was all messed up when the Travellers came in. There was chaos in terms of the relationships between Travellers and non-Travellers, between men and women, between ordained and non-ordained ministry.

Women came to have a real say in the Parish Team. I was very anxious for them to get involved in the National Women's Forum for Travellers. They did so. It was right. But the consequences were quite painful for us because it really opened us up to a whole area of feminism. I desperately needed help to work through all of this. I needed to get people to think about change. What I found Avec good at was helping me to think about how to manage change and how to cope with the resistance we have to change, and how to think together in the Team about what was happening and get people on board. Doing that was a big thing for me. It gave me the experience of managing very significant change in the life of the Parish.

Two of the big issues that came up were the crises of identity and of authority. The original focus of the Parish was a confident Christian community. The more lay people and Travellers came in, the more we were not allowed to use religious language. People were guarding their own understanding so there was tension and polarisation. Belonging to Church was a big question. The Travellers were professing Christians but they wouldn't have had the narrow sense of Church that the priests and religious had. That caused a lot of tension within the parish.

There was another thing. The priests became involved in a quite different role from that which is traditional for them in the Roman Catholic Church. That was a source of confusion and pain for priests and people. An important and exciting aspect of our work illustrates this. A group of us, Travellers and settled people, set up a project. It was about Travellers' faith and culture. So we found ourselves getting into the Travellers' culture and seeing their faith from that perspective. That is very different from preaching our faith to them. Slowly we realised that what we were doing was to affirm Travellers' culture. When we stopped to try and understand ourselves, we saw ourselves as a resource to the Travellers and their culture. We were helping Travellers to build a strong Christian community in their own culture. That was a radical shift from building the Travellers into the Parish. That led us into working at problems experienced by Travellers such as addiction, discrimination, prejudice, racism. We got involved in these issues with the Travellers in much more structured and personal ways. Initially we had said that we were available to every Traveller in the country. Now we said we are going to try and resource the Parish so that people are going to get the services they want and need.

We formed a partnership with people who were involved in promoting the culture of Travellers. These were really successful. We got into the notion of pilgrimage. "Walking pilgrimages" were organized which combined exploring the culture and faith with social justice issues. Our first one was in 1990. It was a 150 miles pilgrimage to a holy well in the west of Ireland. There were forty of us, twenty Travellers and twenty settled people. We camped at various places. What was really helpful about it was that it brought all the different organizations together – The Dublin Committee for Travelling People, the Fingal group, the Dublin Travellers, The Education Development group, The Parish and Travelling People and four lay groups which up to now had been a little bit in competition; I suppose there had been some jealousy, envy, suspicion and hostility. All kinds of bonds were formed between all the different groups. A lot of good things happened. I found that there were a number of Travellers who were thinking about what it was to be a Traveller in Ireland today, what it means in terms of the Church and how the Church could respond. Avec helped me to see that their thinking would help mine. I remember talking to one Traveller and saying, "Look we have this cultural project coming on. We are trying to get a few people together. Would you be interested in coming?" And he said, "Oh I don't know. Maybe I'll give you half an hour or something." So he came along and he spent the whole day with us because we were talking about things that he was interested in. That's where Avec helped. After that we used to spend the whole day just having conversations about being a Traveller in Ireland today. Time boundaries weren't a great thing. What I tried to do was what I'd learnt from Avec – to structure and deepen the conversation by asking questions. I used to let the conversation go on. They would be going on and on and all over the place. Then, every now and again, I would ask questions, "Well why are we here?" "What's the purpose of the meeting?" At first they found that very frustrating. After a while they began to appreciate that my job, my role, was to try and put structure into our thinking. It was difficult because the notions of structuring and laying boundaries were very foreign to Travellers. But they saw that it helped them to explore things.

Initially the meetings were in Dublin. We'd invite Travellers. The ones who were really thinking about what it means to be a Traveller in Ireland today would come. Others didn't. So everybody just got in the cars and went down to the Travellers wherever they happened to be. That's where we had our meeting.

You know most of the thinking around about community development was concerned with geographically stable communities. The Travellers' communities aren't based in one particular place. They are very mobile. You might be working in a particular place with a group of people and overnight they've gone somewhere else and formed a different community with other groups. So community development was about relationships between people and groups and about different places in which they could enjoy and develop them and relate well to settled communities.

From these small beginnings we organized a project and got funding for it. The project concept was helpful. It had limited objectives – it didn't just go on and on. Travellers could respond to that. And it had a product – a report or a book and that sharpened up everybody's mind. Also the Travellers said, "If they can have projects so can we." And they did and they got funding for them!

The first part of this project was about gathering information from the Travellers about them and their oral tradition. From what we had already done, we identified various aspects of Travellers' culture that we wanted to look at. They included christenings, communion and confirmation, marriages, funerals, customs around their prayers and devotions and pilgrimages. By now there were five Travellers in the Team who were employed by the parish and funded by the state. We decided that for three months they would gather information. As it is an oral tradition they would go round to the sites just talking, listening, remembering and recording. A supermarket chain, Quinsworth, bought us a high quality recorder.

But the Travellers who were going to gather the information were concerned. They said, "What am I going to do with these Travellers from nine o'clock to five o'clock Monday to Friday?" This made us realise that if people were going to do those kind of interviews they were going to need a bit of training in the skills of having these conversations and in assertiveness. So we built that into the programme. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays they would be out gathering information. Monday and Friday would be training sessions.

So the Travellers who were members of the team sat down and had conversations with other Travellers. "What was it like when you were getting married?" They had a conversation about that. Then they would ask, "What preparation did you have when you were getting married?" "What kind of preparation do people have today?" Then people would make comparisons. Then they would go on to other things, "How important are christenings to you?" "What are the customs around funerals?" They just had conversations, taped them and brought them back.

The next thing that we did was to listen through all the tapes and pick out the commonalities in what people were saying about their customs and wrote them down. And again this is where the skills-mix came in. There were some who were able to write and that's where they began to come into their own. They weren't always great at the art of conversation. We put all this into a book. This was important and useful. Everybody was getting a better sense and understanding of Travellers' culture and faith: the five Travellers who were gathering the information, the Team who were studying the tapes and the parish.

The third phase of the project involved using the material to inform others about Travellers. We focussed on other groups who could directly affect Travellers for good or ill. Now we were branching out. We had a week with teachers. We designed a training module for people who had Travellers' children in their classes. We went to a national Seminary in Ireland. We went to the institutions which were training lay ministers. All the sessions we had were based on the information we had gathered and written up. Travellers went with us to present the material and engage in the discussions. I remember a session with a group of lay deacons only a few months away from being ordained as priests. Some of the stuff they were coming out with was atrocious. One man was going on about Travellers' drinking habits. A Traveller turned to him and said, "Where are you getting all that information from? Where do you work?" He said, "Well, I work in a pub." The Traveller said, "Surely to God that's what you're seeing. You're only seeing people who are coming in for a drink. Why are you basing your view of all Travellers on a group of them who are coming in for a product that you are selling?"

The Travellers were very shocked at some of the deacons' comments and really hurt. So then we arranged another meeting when we did a fish bowl exercise. I introduced a Traveller and said, "Now, Kathleen can you tell us whether there were any times when you really felt hurt?" She talked about her experience of going to a dance where she was badly treated. Someone else talked of the previous meeting and the way the deacons had spoken to them. Suddenly the deacons found themselves moving away from talking about Travellers to listening to Travellers talking about their experiences of life. You could have heard a pin drop. I've never seen so many in a group change right in front of me. Their fantasies about Travellers were corrected through being confronted with the reality of Travellers' experiences. One of them was in tears saying how bad she felt because of the way she had been treated by somebody. Real development, real education, real learning of a very deep kind was taking place. Avec gave me the tools to get a handle on it. Up till then all we were doing was responding to emergencies and those emergencies continued. But now we were slowly affecting fundamental changes in Travellers and settled people who dealt with them in church and schools. Lots of publications emerged from this phase. This material is a resource on Travellers' culture and of enormous value.

All this took us very much away from the sacramental church. Originally we would have been involved in the sacraments as well as the whole issue of social justice. That caused a crisis of identity for the priests: "What does it mean to be a priest today in a Catholic context when you are not saying mass every day and not baptising because that is being done in each area?" That caused some painful heart searching for priests. It also caused problems for lay people. It was pulling away from local tradition and a whole lot of expectations. We were supposed to be saying mass, baptising children and looking after the catechism preparation. One of the difficulties was that we didn't manage the external boundaries very well. For instance, we didn't negotiate very clearly with the local priests and parishes who, as a consequence, were preparing Travellers for the sacraments.

The changes that have lasted are the partnerships with the Travellers and secular and government agencies working with and for Travellers. The Travellers were on contracts when I left and it is no longer an option whether or not to bring them in. They are permanently in the team. You can't get them out.

Looking back it opened up a new avenue for me of creativity alongside the sacramental. It opened up the excitement of entering into the experience of others and what they think and feel. "What does it mean to be a Traveller today?" was a key question. It changed my approach to my ministry. I use variations of it with different people. So, for example, in my present position, I ask "What does it mean to be a seminarian today?" It's really opened me up, it's freed me. The word I use a lot in my work now is "conversation". When people come up I'm saying, "Let's have a conversation." So we come back from inter-congregational meetings, we have conversations which pick up what happened. The big thing that's been lasting with me is collaboration. We, the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity are collaborating on our formation programme. We are partners. And, just as we did with Travellers, we're getting the novices working on our separate and common heritages. Here we have another group of people who are working together on a common project and who are

beginning to reflect on the process of working together. That's one of the things that has stuck with me. Collaboration and reflection are very strong with me now.

I think one of the key theological issues around today is certainly collaboration. I've had experiences of collaboration which have been very enriching. I've seen how creative it can be. And I've experienced the pain of it. The pain of the confusion of not being sure where things are going and not having the answers to a lot of the questions that are being raised. But I have a sense that it's the way forward and there's a rightness about it. That has been ingrained in me. Collaboration is, I believe, the way forward. We are at the infancy stage of collaboration. Nobody knows quite what it is except that it's different from what it was. Basically, of course, it's about relationships. It's about being in partnership with various people and struggling and coping with a world that is changing rapidly. It's not about trying to stop the world because it's caught us out. It is much more about making a creative response to the world's agenda.

But I'm not just a community worker in all this, I'm a priest working in community. I don't feel it compromises me being a priest. When I was with the Travellers I was experiencing a lot of pain and suffering which they were suffering. One of the big issues was first cousins getting married. This I had some difficulty with. I felt more and more that we had to have a conversation about that, what's it doing. There was a big dispute. Some said, "It's consummately okay." Others said, "It's not great for the health of future generations." The Church was struggling with the question, "How can we respond to the request from Travellers for dispensation for first cousins to marry?" I ran the gauntlet for a lot of people. I set up a forum where everyone could discuss the issues. It's not coming out with any great answers at the moment but I believe very strongly that you have to ask questions and work at them together. I see that to be a priestly function, not simply to pontificate. The bishops looked to us to see how we might approach the problem. What I'm saying is that it's a priestly role. We've got to have the courage to ask awkward questions. Authority figures need to listen. That restores their authority. The people grow. As a priest you've got to help to "manage" the disturbance. The Tavistock Institute course is helping me to do that. By managing I mean acknowledging what is happening including the confusion that is arising. I've got to manage my own experience. I've got to help people to get the skills to manage it for themselves. We've got to manage it together. I've moved away from the notion of team to some extent to that of "managers". Seeing the parish priest as a general manager and seeing various of his co-workers as managers in their own right and encouraging them to manage their own subsidiarities. You know, you've got to manage what's happening in your area and part of the general manager's role is to support and help them to do that. A big part of it is event management. This is very different from management as telling people what to do. I'm not talking about it in that sense at all. What I'm talking about is participation in management, shared management if you like.

There are times when it is very tempting to go back to telling people what to do and say, to be an authority figure, especially when your anxiety is high and you don't know where you're going. Deep down at the centre the authoritarian approach is not right. You have to stay with the pain of not knowing. I think this is very important

for my Order and for the Church to do just that. We've got to work in a collaborative way. We've got to get away from the individualism. We've got to see ourselves as a corporate body in our community. We've got to respond to the needs of people. I suppose I'm going back very much to Pope John XXIII and his emphasis on working with all people of good will. That is the way forward to build a new Church and new communities.

The Travellers have changed. Their culture is much more important to them now that they've explored it and that some settled people value it. They're now challenging the way in which they're defined as a problem by other people. They're saying that they're not the problem. They now redefine the problem as: "How settled communities can accommodate their culture and how the two cultures can get on together." They're much more proactive. They're thinking things through for themselves and particularly what it means for them to be Travellers in Ireland today. What has happened has broadened their horizons. All kinds of people and organizations who have good will towards Travellers are working together with the Church and the Travellers.

Social issues are very much on their agenda. We worked hard at them. Not as many evictions are taking place. One of the ways in which we all became more proactive was by becoming much more involved in the media, particularly with the television. The Travellers and the Parish are speaking out and putting their case forward. The Travellers are on the map now in terms of the media. The Travellers are beginning to say, "Well there's something happening." The media look to the Parish and say, "What have you to say about this?" And the Travellers are outstripping the Team in terms of all this. They are speaking for themselves. That is a real mark of change and shows the effectiveness of the education and development programmes. They're ahead of us. Travellers are well able to speak for themselves. The Travellers of 1995 are very different from Travellers of 1916.

But there is a crisis of authority in the Travellers' Parish that a lot of other parishes are going to have to experience ten years from now. Travellers and women are right in there, on the inside. They are beginning to make demands on the Church for change. And it is not easy because we don't have the answers.

The changes in the Parish were enormous and the rate of change was rapid. There were a lot of casualties on the way. The Team was growing bigger and bigger. The infrastructure needed isn't there yet. During the last stage of my time I was working at what was happening in the Team. What I wanted to do through the Avec Diploma course was to look at the impact of all this change and what was taking place outside of the Team, but the death of my father prevented me completing that. However it helped me to work on a bigger map.

What I got from Avec helped me to promote those radical changes in the Parish and work through the problems connected with them. The first thing was the notion of working *with* rather than *for* people. I hadn't got that concept before. The *avec* approach gave us the language. The second thing was the idea of being proactive. We continued to respond to whatever demands Travellers were making on us. Usually they were quite dramatic. People dying in very tragic circumstances. That continued. But we used lifeboats rather than making the whole ship a lifeboat.

Also, Avec helped me by giving me support and opportunities to get away from the Team to think things through. That was vital. That was one of the important things about Avec consultations. They broke the chain of just responding. Working at things with people who hadn't got the same vested interest was very productive. They could ask key questions which if asked in a parish context would be explosive. Those questions opened up new possibilities. I remember one of the questions Catherine Widdicombe asked that was very insightful. She said, "Are you always like this, jumping from one idea to another idea at such a speed? That must be very frustrating for people to work with." I hadn't seen it before. I realized immediately that it must have been extremely difficult for people I was working with. Since that I have become more conscious and careful about thinking things through with people at their pace.

Looking at things more generally I see that there's a whole field of consultancy work opening up. In the course I am doing with the Tavistock Institute I'm looking at what's going on in the National Health Service and the Department of Health. I am interested to find that in some ways the Church is in fact ahead in terms of working collaboratively and examining what it means; in terms of accountability; in terms of work consultancy and group work. We've been at all this for more than twenty years longer than my colleagues in the council offices. Avec prepared me for all this. The more I talk about my experience, the richer it becomes. It underlines for me just how important it is for us to learn to work collaboratively in the Church and with all people of good will in contemporary Irish society. Many things underline its importance: the changing role of women in Church and community; the need to compensate for the growth of individualism; the need for people to work together on the social agenda.

Observations and Impressions

One thing seems to follow another quite naturally in this story. Approach and processes slip into place as though the human setting was made for them. Even the pain of making the changes does not deny that. The developments have an authentic place in the scheme of things. Initially a small team of priests were taking initiatives to respond to the needs and problems of Travellers as they arose. Crisis management was the name of the game for priests and Travellers. Some five years later Travellers and priests are organized in a team and together pursuing vigorously a wide ranging, structured, proactive community development programme with migrant groups. The cycles of work-culture changes have gone full circle for both groups of people, the settled and the Travellers. Natural they may be, but they are extraordinary and exciting changes that take people from treating symptoms to dealing with causes. There was a work-culture mutation. They were indeed making substantive progress to achieve their aim, "In solidarity with Travellers to promote transformative interaction between Travellers and settled people in ways which are liberating for both."

Sean Farrell attributes the changes to a combination of mundane causes:

- working with Travellers rather than for them;
- thinking things through privately in a secure consultancy environment outside the work situation;
- seeing the parish work in a wider context;
- changes in understanding and perspective that came from getting into the Travellers' culture;

- working for development of faith embedded in the Travellers' culture rather than in the settled Church;
- the theory and practice of management.

This means that, instead of trying to build the Travellers into the Parish culture, the Team was building a parish with the Travellers in and through their culture. In short, the process was one of acculturation of the Christian faith into the Travellers' culture and Church rather than into the settled culture and Church.

For Sean Farrell there was creative interplay between working privately and publicly and between working with the Team, the Travellers, and Avec.

Whether consciously or not, the Team were using not only the *avec* approach, but methods used by anthropologists and those engaged in community studies.



Four:
THE CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS
Gabriel Robin

Sister Gabriel Robin is a member of a religious order, the Canonesses of St Augustine. She was the first woman president of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors in England and Wales (CMRS) recently renamed as the Conference of Religious. (Other women religious had been joint Presidents when one was a woman and the other a man.) In 1990 she became the General Secretary, a post she still holds.

Gabriel Robin, a woman in her fifties, is very widely experienced. She has been a headmistress and the superior of a religious community, a member of the General Council of her Order and the head, the provincial, of the English province. She is an accomplished linguist. For over twenty years she has been visiting religious communities and has attended, organized and facilitated interaction conferences in Africa, Asia, Latin America and various European countries. She brings a sharp and disciplined mind and her wide knowledge and vast experience to bear on the life and work of religious in contemporary society.

The Conference of Religious is representative of all the apostolic religious orders in England and Wales. (Basically there are two kinds of religious orders, "apostolic" and "contemplative". Ministry is the primary determining influence of apostolic religious; formal prayer is that of contemplative religious. The one is mobile and active in the Church and the world; the other is set apart from the world in stability and

solitude. But these bald distinctions mask a complex of similarities and differences.) The purposes of the Conference are: to promote the welfare of apostolic institutes; to effect closer co-operation with one another, contemplatives and the Church at large; to provide an official reference with ecclesiastical and civil authorities.

People from apostolic religious orders attended Avec courses in large numbers and used its consultancy services from the beginning. Gabriel attended a ten-day consultation for people at regional and national levels. From 1986 to 1991 Avec worked with the Conference of Major Religious Superiors on a series of tasks: preparing the members of the Executive for a week-long consultation with the members of the Bishops' Conference; facilitating better understanding between apostolic and contemplative religious; helping to reconsider the prophetic and other functions of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors and to revise its organizational structures; designing and organizing courses for new provincials; forming an association of consultants and facilitators and a community development unit under the aegis of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. Gabriel illustrates what she thinks of the *avec* approach from these experiences.

Gabriel Robin's Reflections, February 1994

In 1987 the Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales invited the members of the Executive Committee of what was then the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (now the Conference of Religious) to meet them for several days to discuss topics of mutual interest. That was a historic meeting, the first of its kind. I was President of the Conference at the time. Anxious to make the most of the occasion, the Executive Committee decided to spend two days together in a conference centre preparing for the meeting. We invited Avec staff to facilitate the sessions.

I remember being impressed by the kind of facilitating that you and Catherine did. We were already thoroughly prepared for the content of the discussions with the bishops. Surveys had been carried out and plenty of material had been gathered. You helped us to determine the most effective way of approaching this material with the bishops. I do not think we could have done this ourselves. You helped us experientially, through role playing responses we felt might occur between the various participants in the discussions - bishops, vicars for religious, contemplative religious and apostolic religious.

One of the things that emerged was that we were playing out the ways in which bishops of a previous generation thought and acted. In fact, these were stereotyped ways. That came as a revelation. Undetected, they would have had adverse effects on the meetings with the bishops. Getting into the shoes of the people we were actually going to meet and discovering these things for ourselves were much more effective ways of preparing than simply being told the kind of feelings and approach the bishops would have. This contributed much to the success of the meetings.

That occasion was a good experience of a methodology which was highly participatory. It led us to doing a great deal of work together in the following years. The way in which you prepared for events with us has profoundly affected me and the way I now work. Your method was always very realistic in relation to what we were

doing. That has been true for all Avec courses which have always been geared to the people who came to them. You have taken people where they were, found out what their needs were, and then worked with them.

I have memories of us spending many hours in preparation for meetings. We started off by picturing the main features and factors of the situation. Then I remember quite often that I brought in other elements and other facts I knew about the groups or people we were going to be working with, about our particular ways of working and about the way things happen in our Church and in religious life. All kinds of things occurred through grappling with those things until we arrived at an agreed picture of the working situation. Some people found that rather tedious. I found it so important that I always do that in preparation for meetings now. I was doing it this weekend for a meeting of our own Congregation on justice and peace in Brazil. People from different countries are coming to this meeting. The coordinating team spent a long time on that preliminary stage. First we collected all the basic information and ideas and wrote them up on sheets of newsprint so that everyone could see and think about them. That helped us focus on the purpose of the meeting and the needs of the participants. Then we asked everybody to engage in formulating our objective until we had complete agreement on it.

I could not tell you for certain now how much of this I learnt with Avec but I remember using this method for the courses we ran for provincials of religious orders and for other events. We used to spend a lot of time on it. Certainly, I have never known anyone other than Avec people do that kind of preparation so thoroughly and with such detailed planning. Basically this planning is about organizing for the creative participation of all those involved. It is about opening up the agenda, not fixing it. The important thing is to get the objectives clear and the first evening and morning of a conference planned. I realised this again from the meeting we were planning this weekend. Then you are ready to go along with a group of people who have come from different places. You can hear what they have to say. You can test out with them what you thought were their needs and what they want to get out of the meeting. I am more prepared now to be open ended, to let things develop and to enable those present to make their own decisions. You need a certain amount of confidence before you can allow meetings to be relatively open ended. I know I have grown in that kind of confidence.

One of the things of value to religious congregations has been the preparation for General Chapters that Avec has done with them. We did an exercise on this at one of the courses for provincials. One group set out very clearly all the stages of consultation between communities and the group of religious responsible for preparing a chapter. This was extremely helpful. The provincials who had been engaged in the exercise came to see the whole process of preparation completely differently. They realised that the more you can involve everybody, the more they will be part of whatever comes out of a chapter or another meeting. That exercise could be done over and over again, because the more people are involved from the very word go in anything to do with their own lives (and that is what our chapters and assemblies are supposed to be about), the more the decisions that are made will be accepted and lived out.

I have never studied community development theories, although I had picked up some of the methods and ideas. What I liked about what you were doing was that it

corresponded very closely with what I have always wanted to do, and that is to be educative. That means drawing things out from people, not just giving them things. The purpose of community development is to give people the means to develop themselves and their communities. That is very different from someone telling them what to do or doing it for them. Community development goes along with an educational code of practice. Then I have always liked the fact that whatever you are doing is not limited to the immediate task. The immediate task is always seen in the wider context of community development, whether that of a congregation, an institute, the Church, a parish, or society. I have always felt really excited by that. So there was an immediate affinity between what I wanted to do and what you were doing, and with some of the things I had already learnt through courses organized by the Anglican Board of Education on how groups worked. So I did have some basis, and it was like taking on from where those courses left off. I found Avec had a coherence of theory and practice which fitted in with what I wanted to do.

Later, in 1989, I attended one of the ten-day consultations for people with responsibilities at regional and national levels. That was excellent. People learned a lot from each other through the presentation of their own work, through understanding other people's work and through exploring things that would improve each other's work. I think it is very sad that more bishops, especially from our Church, did not attend those consultations for national leaders. I think they would learn so much more about the value of proper ways of consulting people, about decision-making and about people developing through their participation in the structures.

There is such a great need for that kind of course. There is a need for clear thinking when you are in a highly responsible position in an organization. If you are not thinking clearly, you cannot help other people to think clearly. They have to struggle against your muddled thinking. The primary activity that Avec engages in is thinking alongside people and helping them to think for themselves more clearly at a personal level but also at an organizational level. I think you need both. I have benefitted so much from having had both - thinking with Avec on my own and thinking with Avec together with the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. I would have missed out if I had not had both. All this thinking is a lot of hard work! But there is no substitute.

When I came to Avec for the ten-day consultation I had been asked if I would take the job of General Secretary of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. My fear was that a General Secretary's job could just be one of sitting in front of a typewriter or computer in an office. I was not prepared to do that kind of work. So I really needed to see whether I could use my skills and gifts, especially the gift of being able to start things off creatively which I had used to good effect as President. I did not want to be in a position where I no longer had that possibility. I had also to consider whether I could change roles from President to Secretary. I used that consultation to come to a decision about these critical issues. With the help of the group and the staff, I worked out ways of making the transition. I had set out my beliefs in my work paper and the consultation convinced me that I could continue to put them into practice, for instance by developing, promoting and facilitating the sharing of authority and responsibility and by building relationships across groups and communities.

Having done the Avec consultation for myself and having become the General Secretary, I saw the need for the Conference of Major Religious Superiors to make a re-appraisal of its aims and objectives in order to become more effective as a body and particularly as a prophetic body. There are many levels and ramifications in that. The Conference had reached the point where it needed something that brought all the different aspects of its work together so that it was not just a collection of activities but much more of a collective organization. It needed a very strong purpose and direction and at the same time, people were beginning to ask how a body like this could be prophetic. How could we move from being simply an association for mutual support to an organization that had a role in society, a voice and a real influence? We felt we needed help.

What made me turn to Avec was the help we had had in preparing for the meeting with the bishops and the personal help I had received through the consultation. Without having gone through the individual consultancy I do not think I would have asked you to work with the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. So I would most certainly underline the need to keep up this private consultancy work with individuals.

That decision led us to do more work together and eventually to produce a revised organizational structure that everybody agreed upon after extensive discussions. It worked. I valued the clarity you brought to the task and the step by step approach. One of the things I remember was, having clarified the purposes of the Conference, you asked us to list all the key factors that had to be taken into account and respected if the organization was to work effectively. I think you called them "design criteria". Completing those two stages meant we had guidelines for testing out the way in which the Conference of Major Religious Superiors was organized and for re-designing it. This list of criteria had to be applied not just to the whole but also to any part. That helped us to ensure that each part worked on its own and in relation to the others. So the whole thing worked. I found that fascinating. That approach to the whole organization and its different parts is still with us and the revised organization is still working very well. The little booklet you and we drafted, setting out how the Conference of Religious (as we now call it) works, has been invaluable. This year we have reprinted it with a few adaptations because some of the member organizations have changed. But it is still our brief, our kind of blue print.

Provincials form the main body of the Conference. They represent their order or institute during their term of office. This means that about 20% of those present each year are there for the first time. In the past this created problems because they found the structures of the Conference utterly confusing. I remember one person with more confidence than most, standing up at the annual meeting and saying she was completely lost. When Avec was working with us we learnt to take a great deal of trouble to involve new members so that they felt part of things right from the beginning. That paid dividends. The practices we worked out so carefully are now second nature. We have, for example, meetings for new provincials before the annual conference and also at the beginning of this conference, so that new members meet each other and meet the Executive Committee. They each have a copy of the booklet about the structures of the Conference, which we explain. Now newcomers are less confused and they can take a fuller part. So all that work we did to clarify for

everybody the nature of the organization and how it works, and to write it up, has solved many problems. We now have much better meetings too!

One of the things I value most in the work that you did with us was that your starting point was with the working situation, not with a theory, although I know there were theories behind what you were doing. When you drew diagrams you were always picturing what people were actually saying to you about their work and organization. You were not fitting these into some pre-conceived model or other. That kind of a process is tough to set up and tough to see it through. But it works!

Observations and Impressions

Some people think that minimum preparation maximises participation. With Gabriel, I do not hold that view. The nature of the preparation is more important than the amount. It must, for example, ensure that any information that members of the meeting need is readily available to all members, not simply to the privileged few, that structures which facilitate participation can be provided and that the practical arrangements are in hand. The first question to be asked is, "What kind of participation is appropriate and feasible?" Participation and co-operation take many forms. No one form is always right. Each form of participation is either more or less appropriate to people, purpose and situation. In part, preparation is about doing those things which need to be done beforehand to give the best chance that there will be critical and creative participation in the meetings in relation to agreements as well as disagreements. Generally speaking, preparation is more about process and procedure than about content and conclusion. I remember teasing out these and other issues with Gabriel when she was critically reassessing the kinds of preparation that are helpful and those that are not.

What Gabriel has to say about the value of providing consultancy help for individuals and groups matches what has been said elsewhere about reflective practitioners needing reflective communities and vice versa.

One of the big issues which did not emerge in this interview was the relationship between the Conference of Religious being a prophetic voice and a support for local community development and welfare work. The tension between these was resolved when they were seen to be necessary to each other, not in opposition. And when Avec staff, acting as non-directive facilitators, were able to help the Executive and the members of the Conference of Religious to think through and come to a common mind about what it meant to be a "prophetic voice". Doing this was difficult because there was a strong religious tradition of serving the needs of people, especially those in great need, sacrificially and unobtrusively. The majority were comfortable with this. They were not politically inclined nor oriented but they saw the force of the need for prophetic action. Others were highly motivated towards speaking out prophetically and taking prophetic action in relation to a range of socio-religious issues. One of the things which helped them to come to agree to what were radical changes in policy was the realisation that the Conference was most likely to be effective if, for instance, in relation to the preferential option for the poor, collectively they were working *with* the poor in situ and taking prophetic action about the political and social changes needed. Everyone does not need to do both. Indeed some cannot because of their own nature

and that of the work. Interestingly, at the same time that they came to a mind on this, they decided to set up a community development unit and to bring together those with experience in consulting and facilitating which they had just found so useful. That eventually led to the formation of an Association of Consultants and Facilitators.



Five:
RELIGIOUS ORDERS
Maureen Connor

Maureen Connor, now in her late fifties, is a religious, a member of the English Congregation of the Sisters of The Assumption. Most of her professional life has been in education. From 1978 to 1987 she was the headmistress of an independent Roman Catholic girls' boarding and day school. She retired from this post and withdrew from formal education when the Congregation decided to hand over their school to lay management. At this stage Maureen started out on a new mode of ministry. Having studied for a diploma in Pastoral Theology at Heythrop in the 1970's, she took a two-year course in an American University which led to a Master's degree in Theological Studies.

In 1989 she was appointed the Director of a newly formed organization called, "Education for Parish Service". Its aim was "to ensure a sound Christian foundation and framework for lay people undertaking service in the parish". In connection with this she attended an Avec course. Soon she became an associate staff member. For the most part she worked with Catherine Widdicombe on facilitating "chapters" which are key meetings of religious orders to review their life, ministry and work. I acted as a consultant to them in relation to this work. She was involved in the discussions which led to the Conference of Major Religious setting up the Association of Facilitators and Consultants.

Maureen Connor thinks things through with you as she talks and has the ability to think new thoughts with you. Quickly and excitedly you find yourself in a creative conversation. She clearly enjoys thinking and enthuses in a quiet controlled manner about new possibilities that emerge from conversations for pursuing her purposes in the Church and the world. She is now living and working with people in an area of deprivation in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

Both Catherine Widdicombe and I interviewed Maureen Connor at different times. I edited the interviews. She is referring to Avec or to me when she says, "You...".

Maureen Connor's Reflections, April 1994 and March 1995

In 1989 I was asked to set up an organization, "Education for Parish Service" (EPS) to train lay people for ministry in the Catholic church in parish settings. The idea was not to produce substitute priests but to complement their ministry through lay ministry. I felt that it was extremely important that courses should help people to communicate, listen and work with groups. Those were basic skills that I felt all lay ministers needed. The Trustees of Education for Parish Service had suggested that I engage others to teach courses. The previous year I had had a favourable experience of *Avec* when Catherine Widdicombe facilitated our chapter. So I asked her to run one of our courses. She suggested that I came on one of your ten-day courses to acquire the skills to run our own courses. At the time I wasn't that happy about the suggestion but Catherine persuaded me.

The ten-day course was very disconcerting. All the time my mind was on my immediate problem, how to structure a module on working with groups for a disparate number of lay people coming on the first Education for Parish Service course I was organizing; what ought to be included; how to make out a syllabus together; what methodology should we employ? Those questions were buzzing around my head. I was required to write a work paper to bring on the course. I thought "this is fine but it's not what I am after". I was most frustrated. Then we spent quite a lot of the time on that first five days looking at mine and other people's work situations. Again to me at that point that wasn't a problem. It was all very new, but there was nothing problematic about it at that stage. I kept saying to myself, "And when are we going to sort out my syllabus?" I even wondered if I was wasting my time and my employer's money. Looking back, in the light of my subsequent experience, I now realise that what I needed was a consultation directly on my concerns about the syllabus. That was my first experience. I went away a little disappointed. I felt that all that I had got on the thing I went to learn about were one or two hints.

However, later I was delighted because that ten-day course actually helped me to discover something about myself that I hadn't known, which was that I had a certain skill with groups and that it was a good idea for me to have some training in how best to use it. One way in which I realised that was when we were looking at other people's work papers. Whoever it was who was running it, I think it was Fred Graham, said to me that I was able to listen to what other people were saying and to enter into their situation. I had been doing what came natural to me, concentrating on the other person and listening intensively. I stopped thinking about my work situation and what I was doing and entered into what they were doing. It was only when Fred commented on it that I realised that not everybody was actually doing that. That helped me to realise that there was perhaps a gift I had that I hadn't recognized and that I needed to develop.

Probably the most significant thing was an imperceptible shift in my own attitudes, which I didn't realise till afterwards and which has actually coloured everything that I have done since. It was about the way of working with and relating to people. It's been a shift from working *for* to working *with* people. I had been a headmistress and one of the things I knew I had to do at this stage was to change my ways of working with people. What was appropriate as a headmistress in a school was not

going to be appropriate when working with adults and in less structured educational systems. That *Avec* course helped me to get into a way of working with adults as adults. That wasn't the only thing, but it was a very important shift in my stance.

So, contrary to my initial reactions, that course was the beginning of something new in my own life. Looking back I realise how valuable it was to me. I wouldn't have been able to tell you that at the end of the course. It wasn't perceptible at that stage. Five years down the line I can say that the course did contribute in a key way to attitudinal changes and has given me lots of tools. For instance it has given me ways by which to work through problems and come to decisions on my own and in groups.

These have been years for us in our Order where we have been taking on enormous changes. Probably my most important work has been to help my Order to structure meetings so that we could think things through and come to decisions on very big things. *Avec* has certainly given me a methodology for taking on a really big task and sorting it into manageable jobs to start working on it. What I'm aware of is that *Avec* gave me a lot about the logic of how to tackle a task. That helped me to discover I am quite a task-orientated person. I dare say this has been my training. Give me a job to do and I will get the job done and that has been a strength. One of the things that's been much more difficult for me has been to care for the people who are involved in getting the job done. *Avec* has actually helped me to be aware of what was going on in people's feelings. That was something that I have done only in these last years. Feeling very safe with the logic of tackling the task gave me the confidence to explore the emotional side. This development in me is important because I am convinced that energy for change springs from the heart. For a long time I have been intrigued by the way in which groups make decisions which they do not implement. My experience would suggest that one reason why this happens is that the decisions had been made with the head and the heart hadn't got there. Getting head and heart working together can be tricky. Fear, for instance, can have bad effects on working relationships and inhibit, confuse and confound rational processes. Catherine and I experienced that when we were acting as consultants to the Chapter of a large religious order. A significant number were afraid of change and the future. Until they faced their fears we didn't get anywhere with the discussions. Pursuing the *avec* approach has helped me to work to both head and heart a bit more effectively.

Anyhow to return to the Education for Parish Service which took me to *Avec*. Some time after that first course there was conflict between the Trustees and myself about who was responsible for what. Having got the working relationships clear on the ten-day course was an enormous help to me. We had drawn out the structure of the relationships on big pieces of paper using pin-people to sort them out visually in front of me. Getting it "out there" and being able to look at it, I still find extremely helpful if the relationships between groups are complex. I find diagrams extremely helpful. So that was good.

As to the course I was organizing. I drew on the content and method of the ten-day course. I ran it for about three years for different people and it worked. The first set of people tended to think the content was trivial. It was only when they were actually working with people that they began to see the value of it. Several of them said, "That course really saved my bacon". The people who came on the courses were working in

their parishes. One woman became a pastoral assistant in her parish with a lot going on. Lack of communication and co-ordination between different groups meant there was a lot of duplication of effort. She asked the parish priest could she form a core group to overcome these difficulties. He said it would be fine but she would have to do it. She used what she had learnt on the course to get the people together, to get them to set an agenda, to tackle the issues. It worked! Some said that it was working with different sorts of people that they found most useful. Others said that what they found useful was material on decision making. Most found the sessions on change and especially the life cycles of organizations useful. That was something I got from *Avec*. By that stage I was beginning to feel confident of putting my own thinking into sessions as well as learning I had from other places. They found that was good.

I worked with Catherine as joint facilitators for the general meeting of a religious order from 1990 to 1993. They call them "chapters". They are big events in religious orders when life, ministry and work are reviewed. This one had some very tough decisions to make. Very strong and conflicting feelings were around. It took two years and countless meetings to prepare for the chapter which consisted of a session of two weeks, a break of six months and then another week. That was a thorough-going test of the *avec* approach. It proved to me just how much it is needed, its strengths and limitations and just how tough it can be to practise it in cultures in which authoritarian approaches have been normative for generations.

We soon realised that the Order was very fragmented. Communities with a long history of autonomy had been grouped together but were not yet integrated into a large whole. Some of the religious had lived in just one place for over fifty years. They were very concerned with what was going to happen to their own community and its buildings. Undoubtedly what was happening anywhere else was of secondary importance. They wanted us to help them to create a union of minds and hearts and to come to agreement about the future radical changes that seemed to be necessary in the size and location of some communities and the selling of some community homes associated with precious memories.

Acting as facilitators to the Chapter involved us working with the General Council of the Order and the Superior General. They had started things off and appointed us. They also formed a group of sisters to help us to prepare for the Chapter and to learn about the *avec* style of working. They called it the Steering Group. Initially, to a greater or lesser extent, members of this group approached things very differently from Catherine and me. They soon adopted the *avec* approach and gradually acquired the ability to practise it. We had good working relationships with them.

By way of preparation for the Chapter there were three preliminary assemblies. At each of these three different sets of sisters came together for a weekend. They taught us a lot about the people with whom we had to work. Many of the sisters didn't know each other very well. There was a general pessimism about any possibilities of change or growth. The election for the next Superior General was a source of common concern. Hurts of the past were bugging the interaction we were trying to promote. In fact they were still fighting the last Chapter's battles. We couldn't get them to make an agenda for the coming Chapter. We had to devise ways of helping the sisters to explore their feelings and to come to terms with them and their disappointment

about the past, their fear about the future and their anger at the ways they felt that they had sometimes been mis-treated.

To complicate things even further there were other emotional undercurrents related to a wide range of approaches to religious life and change. Some liked life to be quiet and unchanged. At the other extreme were people who wanted change and felt it would most likely happen if you stirred everything up very angrily and had an outburst. Working at all this was quite hard, tiring and long drawn out. But together we kept at it. A session on how feelings affect our judgements and the choices we make helped them to "own" their feelings, to see what might lie behind them and to consider how they were going to handle them during the Chapter. I think all that did help when we came to the actual Chapter and especially when we moved towards decision-making.

On one occasion we enabled the Chapter to make some progress in a discussion about the closure of a fairly large house. Everybody knew it would have to be closed because the handful of sisters who were hanging on were very elderly and only just coping. No-one else was willing or able to join them. And the building was becoming increasingly unsuitable for older people. The sisters were greatly loved in the town and the work that they had done was valued but it was no longer as necessary as it had been. Two sisters in that community were violently opposed to any change and it had not proved possible to move them on previous occasions. Members of the Chapter were in a quandary. They knew the situation was intolerable but they did not want the sisters to be hurt nor did they want to take another decision which would not be implemented. So at that stage, I said to Catherine, "I think I could use an *avec* method here which might help them to consider what they want to do and what they don't want to do by listing the pros and cons." And that is what we did. Taking the points from the members we constructed a large quadrant chart which they could all see. It had sections on reasons for closing, reasons for keeping open, reasons for not closing, reasons for not keeping open. Without any difficulty they came to a unanimous decision that the house must be closed and that they must implement this decision. Then we got them to work out how they could ensure the decision was carried out with least possible hurt. They felt that the sisters in the community should learn of the decision directly from the General. She undertook to visit them immediately after the Chapter and everyone else agreed not to talk about it to others in the interim. This is what happened. It worked well. Members of the order realised that there are ways of resolving situations that had previously proved impossible. Confidence began to rise.

Also, we helped them with the extremely difficult task of getting a hundred people to agree a Mission Statement. We did that by reducing the task to small bites which you could get straight and then move on to the next lot. So it was more an exercise in logic. Our job was essentially that of a non-directive worker - getting all points included, working with them on their ideas, staying with things until we got agreed statements.

Before Catherine and I were asked to act as facilitators, the Superior General and her Council had appointed a professor of sociology and a working party to consider the personnel and resources of the congregation and to come up with firm recom-

mendations. That they did. The professor produced a series of massive reports full of profound insights and radical, exciting possibilities. Unfortunately Catherine and I and some members of the Steering Group found ourselves in conflict with the professor and her working group, the Superior and the General Council. The conflict was about differences in our approaches to the use of the reports, not about their content. They had put an enormous amount of time and energy into producing several highly professional detailed feasibility studies and comprehensive interlocking recommendations. They were deeply committed to their analysis and conclusion: their hearts as well as their heads were in the work. They said they wished it to be considered objectively. But quite naturally they sprang to the defence of it when it was questioned on what appeared to them to be non-rational grounds. We struggled long and hard to avoid attack and defence and to get any and all ideas considered openly and critically and modified or accepted or rejected. We understood that that was our job as facilitators. But it felt to us as though the professor and her colleagues thought that we were there to promote the recommendations of the working party.

For some time we continued our work in parallel. Periodically we discussed together the presentation of material to the interim Assemblies and the Chapter. At one stage we were able to help the professor and her working party to put over their views to people who were not academics. The fundamental differences in our approaches, however, continued to cause difficulties, tension and mistrust between us. It was as though the professor felt that the beauty of her arguments ought to have swayed the day. We were saying that behind the statistics were human lives, vocations, emotions, fears and hopes. Working out the future was much more than writing an academic paper and agreeing or disagreeing with logical arguments. These encounters failed to improve things, they did in fact deteriorate.

Accumulatively all these things were having very bad effects upon the situation and our ability to do our job as facilitators. Eventually in consultation with you, we conceptualised the situation as we saw it. In a diagram of the dynamics of the situation we mapped out the interactions that were occurring between the different groups and the possible dynamics that were being induced between and by the two working groups and their different methodologies. We traced out the possible effects of the anger and frustration we had encountered. Then we came to the conclusion that we simply had to reflect the whole scene as we saw it back to all those with responsibilities for the Chapter and to get them to consider it critically and creatively. We were very nervous about doing so but we screwed up courage and did so. We had meetings to try to get an agreed picture of what was happening and to work at the implications. Using the work we had done with you, we constructed a diagram stage by stage with them showing all the groups with which we were working, their different, and in some cases conflicting, aims and approaches and the mishmash of positive and negative feelings. Eventually we got an agreed picture and we got our respective roles a bit clearer.

During the discussions, the professor and her working party challenged a way ahead devised by the Steering Committee to which Catherine and I had been acting as facilitators. They put forward an alternative. They were taken by complete surprise when we proposed radical changes in the processes which enabled their alternative

plan to be implemented. From this moment trust began to build up between us. Our working relationship with the professor never looked back. By the end of the Chapter we were able to laugh together at our earlier struggles. They wanted Catherine and me to carry on as facilitators. There was a better understanding between us and particularly with the professor about the need for participation and the sisters being involved in decision making processes even though they did not seem to understand some of the nuances of non-directive action. Nevertheless Catherine and I were better able to act as facilitators.

By the end of the Chapter we had certainly helped them to consider all the issues. We had helped them to produce an agreed mission statement. Catherine helped resolve a big conflict between two groups of sisters which had been blocking the whole process through a marvellous session where she got them to articulate what was the matter. We had got everyone including local communities, to prepare thoroughly for the Chapter in ways they had never done before. Certainly, they were more united in heart and mind. But, when it came to the crunch they were very divided about what action to take. There were conflicting objectives relating to the need to make changes, to meet the sisters' needs and to develop a happy atmosphere. Eventually by a majority vote they decided not to adopt the more radical choices. That made me feel sad even though they did make some significant and undoubtedly difficult changes.

It left us with a sense of unease. We had done our best. I believe we had helped them to face the issues and come to their own decisions. Looking back I realise that when we first met this Congregation it was very fragmented. It was made up of individual autonomous communities which had comparatively recently been grouped together. In the end their history of autonomy proved stronger than the centralising call. Although they decided against the professor's working party's radical proposals what has happened since is that the individual houses have decided the fate of their house along the lines of the proposals. I now have a feeling that we took them as far as they could/should go. It was their Chapter and their lives. They, not us nor the professor, had to live with the consequences of their decisions. Our non-directive approach to facilitating certainly helped them to face the issues and come to their own decisions. Had we not been involved, much more pressure would have been exerted upon them to accept the professor's proposals. Whether the Chapter would have been able to resist that will never be known. Events, I think, have shown that our ideas about how far the Chapter and the Congregation could go, even in three years, were proved to be unrealistic.

What we were able to contribute I attribute to the *avec* approach in general and two things in particular. Our objectivity was important. We were outside the situation and we were perceived by them as not being on one side or another, though I think we swayed towards one side actually. We knew what we thought ought to be the outcome. We consciously controlled those views. We didn't declare them. I think we dealt with all the people with an even hand. We made space for people whom we thought were not getting an even hand. I think that was one of the things that did help. We didn't tell them what we thought they ought to do, we didn't think that was our role. The other thing was that we didn't manipulate any of the parties at all. We were clear

that we must not manipulate under any circumstances. We were straight with them and I believe they sensed and knew that. We got open discussions of all the issues – and some of them were painful for them and for us. At times we had to challenge people in authority in private but we did not undermine their positions in public or in private: that would have been counter-productive. Challenging was affirmative.

This kind of work is exhausting, I couldn't take on too much of it. But the methods are highly relevant to Chapters and to work with religious though they are not a magic wand. They are desperately needed. I have worked with several Chapters with Catherine and other people. Since 1989 I've been involved with all the Chapters of my own order in this country and with one or two others.

Getting people to participate on a more equal basis is vital. That is why the *avec* approach is so important. This ties up with my theology very much. I believe the Church is being called to re-discover lay vocation and the equality of everybody in baptism. I've just been at a Conference on work and pay differentials in industry between work people and the bosses. The differentials are enormous and wrong. In the Church the differentials in terms of power and status between "top" and "bottom" are also enormous. Your position determines where you can park your car! I think that the Holy Spirit is calling us to quash the differentials. I'm not saying that we're all the same because we are not. There is diversity in the Church. There's room for different roles and functions and vocations. The option for the poor has got to come near home and recognise the powerlessness of the laity who can't get their voice heard in the Church, who feel that if they say anything they'll be put down. I've just finished a series of classes up in Newcastle for people in a deprived area. The last one was the only one at which there wasn't a priest present. It was the only one at which the people talked and gave their opinions. They were afraid of talking in front of a priest because they've been put down so much. That is awfully sad.

Members of religious orders have been working for some twenty-five years on new ways of living out their calling. The vision is that we should all be involved in decision-making. Obedience no longer means saying, "Yes, mother", and not thinking. It means taking on responsibility for doing the will of God together. That means working hard at discerning together what in our circumstances is the manifest word of God for us. The *avec* processes offer a methodology to do that and to figure out how we can live this vocation in the Church and the world. *Koinonia*, Greek for fellowship or communion, is one of the words going around at the moment. It reflects something of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of a Trinitarian God. The Three Persons of the Trinity, operating in different ways and interacting dynamically, engender communion and community. The work of *Avec* relates to this because it has contributed to the development of Christian communities which honour the individuals and their contributions. I'm enthused by this. Often there's an enormous gap between the vision we see and our ability to realise it. In *Avec* here's a methodology which helps to bridge that gap.

Women religious have been in many ways at the front of the Church in pursuing this new theology and finding methodologies to put it into practice. There are historical reasons for this. At the time of the Second Vatican Council, many women's orders were heavily patriarchal in their set up. Many of them were under the jurisdiction of

orders of brothers or priests. Their rules had to be approved by men. They reflected the status of women when those orders were being founded in the Victorian era – a time when women were not considered to be autonomous adults. Generally speaking women religious were being treated worse than second class citizens. They were treated as infants.

Vatican II directed us to reconsider our religious life and work in the light of the Gospels, the spirit of our founders and the needs of today. That released religious women from domination by men. Vatican II was a way out of oppression. Consequently enormous energy for change was released in the 1960's. The *avec* approach helped us to capitalise on that. Women are pursuing these changes and attracted to the *avec* approach because, generally speaking, by nature they are more concerned about relationships than are men. Ideas about sharing and collaboration seem more natural to women as a way of working than competition and hierarchy. Status is of less importance to them. So the *avec* approach gelled with and added to the ways in which women, left to their own devices, would go about organizing themselves for religious life, work and ministry.

Another reason why women got involved is that they had less to lose and more to gain than men. And a major inhibiting factor when faced with the opportunity of radical change is the fear of losing what you have already, particularly in terms of status. Women had everything to gain so they said, "Let's go for it". The *avec* approach came at that moment of history when that freeing-up was happening and helped to facilitate it. No wonder it caught on.

Another thing is that I think women are better able to deal with situations where they lack control. Maybe they have simply had to be. People work from the margins when they are not at the centre of the power structure. Now this would tie in with what the liberation theologians are preaching. You know, that it's on the periphery that actually things grow and that things can move. In the centre, which is where the control is and the power is, things are much more ossified. Women religious were working from the margins in Church and society. They were not in the central place of control. They had a lot of experience of doing that which is in line with the non-directive approach. If this is true, it would suggest that the *avec* approach is more generally acceptable to those who are not in positions of power than those who have been used to working from the centre in hierarchical, patriarchal ways.

All this about working from the margins ties up with the centrality of the Incarnation. When, if you like, the Trinity looked at the world and said, "What on earth have we to do with this fallen, messed up humanity?" The result was the Incarnation. The second person of the Trinity moves into the world in the weakest possible position. It is almost as if God is saying, "This is how we can have access to these people." I've seen it in Newcastle in a very deprived area where I'm now living myself. If you come in as a professional, you don't have access. If you come in with any badge of authority you don't have access, not to people's hearts. And if we as a Church in the third millenium are wanting to have access to a fallen world then we are going to have to find ways of being as small and approachable as Jesus was in the Incarnation. And I think that the *avec* approach is a way of helping people to do that. It is a valuable way of getting right alongside people which anybody who is going to

be involved in mission could do well to learn. This is what I want to say to the churches. "Look, here is something which we see can work. It is not a high-tech, high profile method. But the method has affinities with the method which God uses. So it has got to have something going for it." The affinities are: it is person centred; it doesn't threaten; it comes in on the same level, alongside; it respects and enhances freedom; it enables; it empowers. Consequently people have more possibilities of taking control over their own lives and destiny. I think that is what the Incarnation is about, what Jesus has done for us. Avec has been invaluable to me. I am very grateful for what I've got from it. But what always grates with me is a suggestion from any organization that it has got the whole answer. Sometimes, I felt that from Avec.

One of the questions, for me, is how we can use all this to help lay members of congregations who feel their priests are in control and that they are on the margins of Church power. When I think of Avec I think of groups. Perhaps the most important thing for me is the way the *avec* approach helps enrich groups without threatening them. I realise that that is not the whole of the *avec* approach. That approach has offered me ways of thinking about issues which help clarify all the material surrounding them and getting it into pint-size chunks that a group can handle and consider. It's offered strategies for dealing with problems and with conflict and a methodology of decision-making. So it would normally be about task work, and problems and work situations. Do we close this school? Do we build that centre? Shall we all move to South Wales? I think it's very, very good on that kind of thing. But I don't think it's helped me to deal with issues that might be about jealousy and selfishness. I haven't particularly found it helped in a head-on kind of way. I haven't actually found that the *avec* approach has helped me specifically with the deep emotional dynamics of groups particularly well. It has helped me with the rational and logical ones and with feelings. I'm talking a bit from my heart rather than my head! Maybe it has helped in an indirect way.

One of the strengths of the *avec* approach is that it has theological underpinning. I'm not sure that it has always been very well articulated but it has actually been there. I think the approach is based on the conviction of God being in the group and in the work of every person. That is important for me. Fundamental to this is the core belief that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and therefore created in and for relationships. Thus the way that people act in groups should reflect the image and likeness of God. When this happens they are creative, outgoing, caring and respecting each person for what they are. What I haven't thought through for myself is the idea of human beings as fallen and where redemption comes in. That is important because if my relationship to God is as it should be, then I will relate to other people as I should. So the *avec* approach is dealing with people as though they relate with people and with God. Without such belief, or some similar belief, you are left with a methodology.

The *avec* approach actually reflects reality in a way which is self-evidently true. I think that is its strength. The groups that I've worked with realised that this was something they could manage. There's nothing esoteric or beyond people. You know you could cope with this. It isn't higher maths. It's in the realm of the ordinary and ordinary people with a good will can handle it. And it will help them.

Another thing comes back to me now as we talk through aspects of my experience. I'm realising that even as I reflect back now at several years distance I am learning from my experience. That's *avec* at its best. You keep on learning and bringing new insights each time.

Observations and Impressions

Maureen Connor shows just how difficult it is to effect change in organizations and develop the members and their potential to pursue their purposes without hurting and damaging people and their relationships. In the case of the Chapter it involved major confrontations.

A consultative process is an action-system which has to operate in the organization as it is and ring true with any aspirations that those promoting it have for future developments. As a mode of intervention it has to be strongly and comprehensively facilitative and entirely non-manipulative: if it is partial or manipulative it malfunctions, it facilitates one group or faction whilst debilitating another. It has to work to the realities in the existing situation, to those inherent in the purposes and vision of those involved and to the nature of the ways and means of moving from one to the other. In many, if not most situations it involves a non-directive system without constitutional power entering a directive or an authoritarian system with constitutional power. As the story unfolded, we saw Maureen and Catherine getting nearer to the realities of the situation. Eventually they were able to conceptualise and to get all involved to read off implications for the consultative processes. Designing and carrying through such consultative processes is a skilled but rewarding activity.

Rounding off a phase in a consultative process is as important as starting it off. Discerning when it has achieved all that it can for the time being is a matter of sensitive judgement. Withdrawing from it before that point loses much of its potential; pressing beyond it can do much damage. Making such judgements involves having realistic expectations of the outcome. Keeping to them involves personal discipline and the faith and confidence to allow people and events to take their own course. At that stage the consultative process wanes and the organization waxes.

Maureen's observation that the non-directive approach was more attractive to people without power than those with it led to an interesting thought. It would be helpful to know in more detail what the non-directive approach brings to the ways and means they already have for dealing with their powerlessness and how the skills associated with this approach correlate with those they have already acquired. Some of the ways people without power have of coping have been identified. John K. Galbraith, for instance, discusses "migration" from mass poverty and "accommodation" to it. He defines accommodation as "refusal to struggle against the impossible, the tendency to prefer acquiescence to frustration". Knowledge of this kind would help to understand how such people might be seeing the non-directive approach, what skills they bring and what is involved in promoting transformative change.

Maureen found most value in the logic of the approach and the processes of progressive learning it induced and least help in understanding and coping with deep seated psychological factors such as jealousy and selfishness. Certainly the approach

is common sense rather than psycho-dynamic. It is not a branch of social psychology or pathology. Saying what it is not helps to define the boundaries of the use and usefulness of the approach and to indicate what it is.

The approach is based upon various kinds of research by social and behavioural scientists into human behaviour in groups, communities and organizations. The non-directive approach releases emotions and feelings through encouraging people to articulate and express them. It requires that they are taken seriously into account. That happened in the Chapter. It enables people to examine them in a thorough-going way to determine their implications and to decide whether they need to seek further professional advice about whether they are pathological or normative and how to deal with them.

The use of this approach does not cause or exacerbate or excite feelings such as jealousy, selfishness or envy. In fact it does quite the opposite. It is a form of action or behavioural therapy tackling these undesirable emotions indirectly, as Maureen says. Giving yourself unreservedly to the work of others through the work paper sessions to help the other to be more effective and to find greater job satisfaction draws deep upon the wells of altruism. Drawing upon these wells dries up the emotional wells of jealousy, selfishness, envy. I know this from my own personal experience and from seeing so many people rejoice in the work of others, who, given a different approach, would be encouraged to feel and express envy. This point could be illustrated in many ways. Fundamentally the approach is affirmative of people rather than destructive, it is holistic rather than partial, it fosters co-operation rather than competition, sharing rather than guarding gifts and hoarding resources.

Stating these things illustrates Maureen's point that there is a great gulf between the way people normally go about their work and this approach. Bridging it is of enormous importance to the well-being of the Church and its work and ministry.

One of the interesting things for me is what Maureen says about the *avec* approach being more natural to women than to men. Many women have in fact complained to me that the ways of thinking through problems and work situations associated with it are male analytical methods! The stories in this book would suggest the approaches and methods are useful to both men and women. But this has triggered off a new line of thought for me. Possibly the approach is more appropriate to both sexes than are the methods of analysis and design which have been developed mainly by men to implement. Possibly there is need for a thorough-going feminine exploration of approach and method. I believe it would lead to new insights in the same way that Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* led to new insights into moral development and enabled her to break out of the thought patterns of her mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg.

Incisively Maureen makes explicit what she sees to be theologically intrinsic to the *avec* approach and indicates the need for it to be better articulated. Howard Mellor makes similar points about the Biblical basis. Possibly the approach has been more adequately described than beliefs associated with it. Perhaps now is the time for gathering the theological fragments into more comprehensive statements. Three brief comments may be in order. First, it is reassuring to find Maureen saying that an approach that was seen to be theologically questionable in the 1960's "has affinities

with the method which God uses". Second, the non-directive approach can help people to engage in several different theological activities: to think about their beliefs; to apply their theology to the actualities of life; to tease out the theological content and significance of events. So, the approach is an inductive and deductive theological tool enabling people to write their beliefs into human affairs and to read off what God is saying in and through them. As Maureen says so clearly, such a tool has to be theologically sound. Third, I first experienced and studied this approach with a group of people of eleven nationalities and no fewer than six major world religions and none. It was commonly agreed that the course was a religious experience. Yet, theology was not on the agenda. Each person read off the intrinsic spirituality of the approach in terms of their own theological and ideological concepts. This indicates the extraordinary power that this approach has to bring people of different faiths together in common endeavour. No one theological statement could cover such diversity. A presentation of the approach dominated by a Christian theological statement of its nature could either suppress its use or inhibit other theological reflection or suggest that one faith has got the whole answer which Maureen rightly abhors. Using and promoting the approach involves engaging theologically as appropriate to people and circumstance. A tricky business which has its own theology.

Chapter Five

CONSULTATIONS ABOUT VOCATION AND WORK

People in church and community work are wont to talk constantly about their vocations, ministries and work. This chapter is about a special kind of work-talk known as work consultancy, to which many references have already been made. (There is a brief description of work consultancy in Chapter I.) When people experience it they know instinctively that it is different. They invariably find it useful. Four people focussed very much on consultancy processes, the value they placed upon them and the use they had made of them. One person, Rosemary Mellor, had just had her first experience of consultancy help. Whereas Brian Woodcock speaks from seventeen years of receiving and giving consultancy help.



One:
FACING BIG CHANGES TOGETHER
Rosemary and Howard Mellor

Rosemary and Howard Mellor are Methodists. They have three children, At the time that I interviewed them the eldest was ten and the youngest three. Rosemary was gradually returning to teaching. For ten years Howard had been the first Director of Evangelism for the Methodist Church. They were in mid-career.

For the past seventeen years I have been privileged to act as a work and vocation consultant to Howard. Early in 1993 he was nominated to become the Principal of Cliff College from September 1994. Through the Revd Dr Donald English, the head of the Home Mission Division of the Methodist Church, the committee that nominated Howard asked me to think with him about his ideas for this new job. This I did through a series of consultancy sessions – some with Dr English, The Revd Dr William Davies (Retiring Principal) and Howard and some with Howard himself.

Concurrently I had sessions with Rosemary and Howard about the far reaching effects of the profound changes that they were experiencing. Rosemary, a few years younger than Howard, was changing from being a housewife to being a housewife-

teacher and from being the wife of the Director of Evangelism to being the wife of the Principal. And they were moving from a beloved house on the campus to a flat in the college. We explored the implications of the changes for both of them and their children, and how Howard felt about Rosemary taking up teaching again and how Howard's new job would affect Rosemary. So far there have been two sessions, sitting comfortably in their lounge after the children were in bed. They were occasions when we talked seriously in a loving atmosphere about issues of vital importance to them with the seriousness they deserved. I felt privileged to be there and to be at the heart of such deep, at times moving, discussions about their Christian vocations and their working lives. The second, four days before Christmas '93 was in front of a log fire on a bitterly cold night after a snowfall. Both sessions lasted about two and a half hours. Whilst these sessions were relaxed they were disciplined and purposeful. More are planned.

This was the first time that I had these kinds of discussions with Rosemary so, having already interviewed Howard about the work I had done with him and arranged a follow-up discussion, I interviewed Rosemary on her own at some length to get her reflections on the two sessions. She concentrated on the way in which we had discussed things rather than on what we had discussed. This was the first time that she had experienced such consultative processes. I asked Howard to reflect on the impact of the sessions upon Rosemary before he knew the content of my interview with Rosemary and at the end of a long conversation about the other work I had done with him which is reported in Chapter Two, Section 3.

This section is about their reflections on the two consultancy sessions just a year after the first and five months after the second. They took place before Howard took up the post of Principal.

Rosemary Mellor's Reflections, May 1994

I felt extremely positive about the discussions we had with you, George, about the changes we are facing. It's not often that you actually get the opportunity to talk to somebody outside of the situation who is understanding and sympathetic and prepared to give you that amount of time to really listen. You can talk to friends about it but to have someone's undivided attention for a few hours is tremendously beneficial because in that time all sorts of things can come out that you hadn't realised were there. I attach great value to them. It was extremely affirmative.

It wasn't an evening to chat socially, it was organized to do a job of work and we were going to do it! So there was purpose, and structure to the conversation which was really good.

The whole area of discussion was about changing; changing jobs, changing roles, changing where we were living, changing positions within a tight knit community. That was all being treated very seriously. We weren't going necessarily to come to any definite conclusions and we didn't know when we started off where we were going to conclude. But, I felt a sense of direction, a sort of focus.

You didn't impose a structure upon us. If you had it would have made us clam up or feel that we were in some kind of process or someone else's agenda. That wasn't the case. The structure that you brought was sensitive to us but also we began to see

structure in the discussion ourselves and were able to bring that in. That was really helpful. The structure came out of your questions, and reflecting back to us. That's objectifying things, looking at things dispassionately. There was time to be reflective, to be honest and to go round a subject and then come back to it again.

I think personally it was good for me to be taken seriously in terms of my work and my life in relation to this college and Howard's new job. That's not to say that Howard doesn't take those things seriously. That's not really what I mean. It was good that the process itself and you yourself took them seriously and that did help me a lot to feel that I wasn't just kind of submerged within this college community and Howard's job which is going to be more demanding than the present one. So for me personally the whole process was encouraging and affirming because we weren't just talking about Howard's job and how it affects me. We were also taking about my job as a teacher and how it will affect Howard and our family.

We moved backwards and forwards from Howard's point of view to mine. For both of us together it was a positive thing – a forum in which we could really pursue at some length things that we have talked about together in a kind of haphazard way. I must say it's helpful to have a third person there, some time to do that – to prod you in the one direction or to bring up something that really maybe you hadn't realized was there or to provide some kind of framework for the discussion.

I don't think I was surprised by our views or how we felt about things but somehow added significance was given to them. It wasn't just like talking over tea about these things which we would have done or in the kitchen while we were making a meal. Because we were talking about these things in a purposeful way they carried more weight, you had to take somebody's views more seriously because of the way in which they were talking. It was more purposeful than just talking.

I knew how Howard felt about things, but the interplay between our views was good. It was easier to deal with somehow. There was a great sense of going somewhere, it wasn't just sort of drifting round. I felt the whole thing was purposeful because we were all investing in the discussion. We were talking about big issues which were going to confront us in our lives. They were being treated seriously by all three of us without being ponderous. No-one was going along with the discussion to keep the other two happy. The three of us were equally immersed in it. We all wanted to be there, and wanted to have that conversation. I think that's terribly significant and important in the whole process.

We were talking about real issues that really did affect us, it wasn't academic airy fairy stuff. They were real, practical issues involved, and they were imminent too. In the next few months we would be dealing with these things. So there was a good old kind of determination about. Howard and I were determined to make this a worthwhile discussion. We were investing quite a lot in it.

The consultations changed our perspectives and attitudes. They sharpened up our ideas about things; they made us listen to each other's points of view and take them seriously. You can't go back to square one again. Without a discussion like that you might move on very, very slowly over a long period of time. But the attentive discussion we had shifts you on a lot quicker. It sharpened up feelings, some unspoken,

some spoken but not in a very thought-through way. You don't keep going over things somehow. It deals with things safely, happily and properly. Therefore you can go on to deal with another area that maybe is still a little bit nebulous, and uncertain.

There's something about these conversations which is contractual. When one says things in these conversations of yours, George, it is almost like making a contract because of the kind of tone which isn't heavy but it is serious. Things are said which people stick to. When you've had a discussion like that in which people have really aired their views, and said very honestly how they feel about things, it's almost like they've said something out loud in a kind of contractual way. It's a strange feeling. It weights things, it gives, I think, extra significance to what people say. So therefore if somebody says about somebody else's work, as we did, "Yes I do value your work and feel it is a terribly important vocation for you and I will do my best to insure it", you know they really value your work. That's an important statement to say in a conversation. So you're not talking for talking's sake. You're committing yourself to the words which you say which is why I use the word contract-making.

Of course there could be a danger of "drawing people on". You could feel exposed or vulnerable if, for instance, there were areas of sensitivity which you hadn't both agreed to talk about or if there was an area of difficulty which one person wasn't happy to talk about or wasn't happy to have aired or if one person did come out with something and the other person refused to acknowledge it. That's not to say that in the long run it might not be terribly productive through these kinds of consultations. But at the time it could be difficult.

The consultations fitted in with my beliefs and my personality. I don't know how everybody would cope with them. I am somebody who likes to talk things out; likes to have everything aired, out in the open; likes to have long discussions; likes to have debates about subjects; likes to verbalise my feelings. So they suited me down to the ground. I was very comfortable with the actual process because it is my belief that open and honest communications are a way to proceed.

There is a time for advice, but we weren't looking for advice. We were looking for a forum in which to deal with issues about the changes that were coming up and then to move on. Now we can air those things between ourselves ad infinitum but sometimes having a structure and making a contract, a commitment, to talk about it in a serious way, yes, yes, that's what we were looking for and what we found.

One thing I want to say is that it's a process which lends dignity and respect to the people who are participating. It's unlike counselling relationships. It's very different to that. In that kind of relationship the counsellor, I don't know that it's particularly accurate, but it's my perception of it, the counsellor is the one who's got it together, the one who's got it sussed out and the counsellee is the one with problems. The process which we took part in is on a completely different basis. We came together in equality with an agenda to look at, a subject to talk about. The starting place wasn't necessarily a problem or somebody coming for advice. It's not that kind of process at all. But actually within the process itself huge problems may get sorted out. It can be preventive. Things could be just talked about and dealt with in a way that if they weren't there might be huge problems for somebody years down the line. There's a kind of, yes, there's a kind

of respect and sense of worth about the discussion, about the people involved in this discussion, about the subject, which I think is healing. Maybe that's a strong word to use really, but that kind of process goes along with it. It isn't a doctor/or counsellor/patient model. It's people coming together to deal with, to look at things.

The situation may be absolutely fraught with problems but for us anyway, the problems weren't the starting place. It was change, transition. Those were the things we were talking about. During that discussion there were areas of potential difficulty and vulnerability that came up. But that wasn't our main topic. At the end of the discussion we can all shake hands in an equal way. None of us has been made to feel somebody in need of support. None of us has been diminished in any way by the talking or made to feel inferior or less knowledgeable or anything like that.

I don't think we would have got as far without this approach. When Howard and I discuss how we feel about things and how we and our family are going to cope with them and our change of role within this community, the results of those two discussions that we had in common are there. They are within both of us and we're drawing on them now to go on. So they are leading us into more discussion and more discussion and more discussion. They gave us some common reference points. That's why it was important to talk to both of us. It affects both of us.

I can't think of anything negative at all about the consultations. I'm not just being kind. I think it was because both of us were equally committed to them and knew that each other were equally committed to them. Now if I thought that Howard wasn't as equally committed to the discussion that would/may have created difficulties or the outcome of it may have created difficulties. But he was as equally committed to it as me.

Howard Mellor's Reflections, May 1994

(Having interviewed Howard at length on what he felt about his experiences of *Avec* and the *avec* approach which are reported earlier, I asked him about any effects of our joint consultations upon Rosemary.)

The effects upon Rosemary of the conversations the three of us had together were very important. They honoured Rosemary's contribution to the marriage and to our life together and honoured her professional ability in a way that was very affirming. Although we'd discussed these things, she and I, nevertheless to discuss them with someone else present was profoundly different. If I may put it like this, people are always discussing with me what my job is, what my role is, but not so much with Rosemary and not with Rosemary and me together, so that was actually, I think, quite important to her and to me. I think she felt that people were taking her seriously, very seriously. I think that it meant that her job, profession, status was seen to be on a par with mine and that just as she was making accommodations for my job, I was making accommodations for her and trying to sort all that out. It was a high moment when I expressed the nature of my commitment to Rosemary's vocation and she expressed the nature of her commitment to my vocation. The effect was, I think, a more equal partnership. I think that she felt much more confident about her job and, yes about her vocation and the possibility of taking it up again. She has done a retraining course, she's done a certain amount of supply work subsequently.

The consultations did not cause any difficulties. They were very helpful. They helped us to think together systematically about things that sometimes we've discussed together and sometimes we have assumed together. I think they've been very valuable because Rosemary is much more content about herself, her work and becoming the Principal's wife and herself as mother, teacher, youth leader, and person in the community. And the fact that this was honoured, not just in the conversations that she and I have had but was honoured, as it were, in front of a third person who was putting shape and structure into the conversation was particularly helpful. I think that we are more content, both of us, more content about what is happening and more committed to each other's part in it.

We plan to continue both the consultancy sessions, that's between you and me George, and also the periodic discussions on vocational matters between the three of us.

After the consultations we were both saying that we thought it would be a good thing for this kind of vocational help to be available to other married couples in not dissimilar situations. Some conversation with ministers and their partners, spouses, needs to be also part of the process by which ministers are now going to be appraised.

Observations and Impressions

By any standards what was achieved is impressive. For ten years Rosemary's vocation as a teacher had been in abeyance whilst she brought up her family. Howard's rapidly evolving ministry had suffused and dominated their lives. In these two consultations they gave equal status to each other's vocations. Doing that involved radical changes of orientation and behaviour. They were encouraged and affirmed through mutually affirming the vital and equal importance of their separate and joint vocations and committing themselves to pursuing them together and supporting each other as they did so. High dividends for a modest investment.

Not surprisingly Rosemary and Howard placed great value upon the conversations and the dynamic and purposeful ways in which they carried things forward and created understandings and engendered commitments which deepened and extended their relationship and which were of continuing practical use to them. One thing that is particularly striking is the way in which key exchanges between them acquired contractual status naturally and unobtrusively and led to profound and far-reaching effects which seem irreversible.

Another thing that was striking was the value Rosemary placed upon the approach to the consultations and the processes and ethos that it engendered. For her, as for Howard, it was important because it was integral to the product. It facilitated the way forward and became part of the way forward because they had embodied it.

It was Rosemary's first experience of such sessions. I was most impressed by the way in which, from limited direct experience of my using the approach without any prior or subsequent explanation of it, she conceptualised the nature of the process and identified the following things which generated it:

- serious application by all participants who invested heavily in the discussions;
- participants were respected as equal partners in the discussion;

- serious things were said seriously but quite naturally without being ponderous or melodramatic;
- undivided attention was given to people and their agendas in a concentrated way;
- creative interplay of perspectives;
- purposefulness;
- dispassionate objectifying of things;
- task not problem centred approach;
- content was specific and practical, not general and academic;
- discussion was structured creatively from within;
- conversation was reflective;
- things dealt with happily and safely;
- not advice giving;
- consultancy relationship, not that of patient to counsellor or doctor;
- the presence of an independent person.

A dramatic and telling list culled from what Rosemary said. Considerable importance must be attached to the fact that someone with limited experience of the approach can draw up such good guide-lines for people who wish to help others to think things through. The ability to conceptualise the approach in this way must mean that she knows how to practise it – admittedly she said that it fitted her beliefs, personality and preferred way of relating to people.

Throughout I was acting as a non-directive work and vocational consultant. I was writing things down and drawing diagrams. They asked for copies of these. Quite deliberately I was encouraging and helping them to consider each person's perspective separately and then the interaction between them. One way in which I did this was to ask Howard, for instance, what he felt about what Rosemary had just said or to ask Rosemary how she reacted to something that Howard said or did. Moving backwards and forwards from person to person and perspective to perspective meant that they/we looked at the same topics and events from several different angles and from both their view points. Moving around the perspectives and allowing them to interact positively was a circular movement that spiralled forward. This gave a sense of purposefulness.

As Rosemary discerned, this approach is based upon a work consultancy rather than a counselling or social work model. Counsellors and social workers are seen as healthy people dealing with those who are not. In the *avec* approach, normally healthy people, consultants and consultors, use their minds and experience to look at situations to see how best to deal with them. They are not people who are not well or not able to cope. They are normal people tackling something that is going to be demanding and using all their resources to see how to do things in the best possible way. That gives a different feel and atmosphere to the discussions. We did not talk about this. We just did it in this way and Rosemary instinctively knew that there was something here which was quite different from the other ways of helping people. She identified some differences but, understandably, she could not get as clearly as she wanted the differences between the disciplines.



Two:
UNITED IN VOCATION, MARRIAGE AND APPROACH
Diane and Richard Clutterbuck

Diane Clutterbuck is a Methodist Deaconess. She is articulate and can speak equally fluently about ideas and feelings. She gives herself completely to whatever she undertakes with enthusiasm, single-mindedness and considerable ability. At present she is the Overseas Service Secretary for the Methodist Church Overseas Division. She is responsible for recruiting people for work in partner Churches overseas and for placing them. Richard, her husband, is a Methodist Minister. At the time he was the Superintendent of the London (Highgate) Circuit but he has just been appointed the Principal of the West of England Ministerial Training Course. They have two daughters, one was thirteen and the other ten. In 1982 they returned from three years as missionaries in Tonga and attended the first stage of a re-orientation course organized by Avec and the Methodist Church Overseas Division. I first met them in 1983 when they attended the second stage of that course which I conducted. At that time Diane was a deaconess "without appointment" busily engaged voluntarily in the Harrow Circuit where Richard was a minister. From 1989-91 Diane participated in a two-year part-time post-graduate diploma in church and community development which Sister Margaret O'Connor and I ran. By this time she was training co-ordinator for the Methodist Diaconal Order, engaged in chaplaincy work and lay training and involved on national committees in addition to her local Circuit work.

The first stage of the courses for returning missionaries was designed to help them to explore the transition they were making; the second stage was to enable them to study the work in which they were engaged and to reflect on their first year back in the UK. All the participants prepared position papers and worked through a cycle of work analysis and design. So they were at the receiving end of consultancy services. Quickly, however, they saw the relevance of the approaches and methods to them and their ministries and with great enthusiasm they set out to acquire and use them. Over the past few years Diane has taken a professional interest in work and vocational consultancy.

We met in her room at Mission House. It was a place of quietness, order, efficiency and human warmth. The conversation I had with Diane was about what led her to use the Avec services and subsequently to practise the approaches she experienced, what happened as a consequence, and ways in which these things fitted or didn't fit with her beliefs about ministry. The conversation was about Richard's ministry and hers and the value and impact of the work consultancy sessions in which they shared on the courses for returning missionaries.

Diane Clutterbuck's Reflections, March 1994

I have used Avec's services in various ways since that very first experience in 1982 when we attended the first part of a course for returning missionaries conducted by Charles New. If that had not been a good experience we wouldn't have gone on to do a second part of the returning missionaries course. In the sessions we had with Charles where he was trying to help us to re-enter the British society we found someone who really understood how difficult it was for us to come back. People are very good at helping people to cope with culture shock when they go overseas but very few people actually understand what it's like coming back and we liked the way he listened to us and talked with us and got alongside us. He made us feel that he was really interested in what was happening to us in a way that I think no-one else really demonstrated at that time. The way that he worked with us was very positive and very helpful and very affirmative. And so when the chance came to do a second course although we could find plenty of reasons to say, "No, we haven't got time", for us it was an absolute priority that we should do that.

During that course a small group of us studied each person's work situation in turn and the things that emerged. To have the opportunity to experience work consultancy at that stage in our ministry was invaluable and I think that style of working has stayed with us to some degree all the way through our ministry. We may not be consciously thinking we're using *avec* style ways of working but it has become part of us. And again we found in you, George, someone who listened and asked questions and gently prodded and pushed and cajoled. You used all manner of devices to get us to see the directions in which we were going and the possibilities which were before us and to see a different way of working from the way that most ministers in British circuits work on their one person shows.

It was very important for us, Richard and me, as a couple, that we did those first two courses together and we've always regarded Avec as an organization or people who have helped both of us together. If one of us had gone on the stage two course alone it would have been very difficult for the other to catch up with that. It was terribly important that we were both there together.

It was very important in our work. It's meant that fundamentally we both work in a similar way. We have tried to adopt the non-directive approach, which I think in many ways was much easier for Richard than for me because he is a much less naturally directive person than I am. We understood clearly the philosophy behind what each of us was trying to do and the ways in which we were trying to work.

Also it helped us on a personal level. As a couple we were helped to see how our ministries were complementary and that we need not fight against each other in the relationship. It helped me to come to terms with myself as a perfectionist. I was enabled through the consultancy sessions to see myself more clearly and to accept myself as I was but also to see that it was actually possible for me to change how I was. And that's perhaps not something you would expect to happen in work consultancy sessions but it did. It operated on several different levels for me at that stage - and did actually later on too when I think about it. Much later, through the *avec* style of working, you helped me to work through the emotional situation that I encountered in relation to my work and vocation during the diploma.

During the sessions we had with you we studied the implications for each of us of working together in the same domestic situation. We talked, for instance, about rooms and the allocation of space, first by discussing in the group things from my perspective, then from Richard's and then from both of our perspectives. And also, not just about working together, but about the whole relationship. I think we did so because we came upon Avec early in our ministry and early in our marriage - we'd only been married four years when we went to our first Avec course. That fundamentally affected how we viewed our marriage, our ministry, and our own personal development.

"We" became a very natural pronoun to be used of us when talking about ministry. Our ministries have been so bound up together even if we have not been working in the same place. We have this sense of knowing that if I am in the right place doing the work that I believe that God is giving me to do necessarily Richard has got to be in the right place too. And the right place for me can't be the wrong place for him. The work consultancy sessions in '83 actually helped us to see that that has to be so. We came to see that we couldn't look at the two ministries separately as if they were going along on parallel lines. There had to be meeting and ever since then there has been meeting. But even till now one of the difficulties we have to face is that the church doesn't actually recognize this and will at different times view my ministry or Richard's ministry as being the more important. And we can't see it in that way. There is no mechanism by which the Church can come to a decision about the way in which it wants to use two of its ministers who are married. In relation to the possibilities of a new appointment for Richard we have just lived through difficulties this causes.

So we, two people separately called by God and also called together in marriage, found that the non-directive approach provided tools for our ministry and marriage. Yes, and I think there is something within us that was seeking that from the very beginning but we were not able to articulate it until we came upon this approach.

During the diploma course I remember that we moved from work to vocational consultancy quite consciously. I needed to look at some vocational issues and until I'd done so I couldn't address myself properly to my work. That experience during the diploma was very important. I think it was a similar experience to the one I had in the 1983 course. It is not an experience that I keep coming back to, but one that keeps coming again. It's always different and it's always a step or two on from last time. But it is almost as if vocation cannot be taken for granted, it's not a once and for all experience which from the point you've acknowledged God's call everything naturally just falls into place. For me it's been something that I've had to keep checking and testing and maybe it's because the Methodist Diaconal Order that I felt called to join has changed so dramatically over the years. My relationship with that Order has also changed very dramatically from being right at the very centre to now being fairly on the edge, but as someone on the edge having a part to play in the thinking of where the Order is going now. And being on the edge is my perception of where I am. Others within the Order would view it quite differently and say that I'm one of the people at the centre, one of the key people, but I don't feel myself to be there. But I feel that where I am at this moment is OK.

I have to go on making sure that the work and the vocation are in harmony and there have been times in this job when I have said I question whether I should remain

within the Diaconate, whether I should be a lay person. And what has been interesting is that others have said that it was important to them that I am part of the Diaconate.

This has given me another insight into what my vocation is about. So it is something about keeping the two aspects in harmony: the vocation's not the work but I've got to make sure that the work is the vocation. It's very easy to get out of that. In the position I'm in now I could start thinking, "Well, you know, this is OK. I like being a church bureaucrat. What could I do next? What other office could I hold within the Church?" I'm sure it would be quite possible to continue along that line. But I don't think it's the right way. I think it's rather going back to the vocation and saying, "Where is it leading me now? What work fits with it? What should I be doing?" Which isn't the same as looking for the next thing.

And we have to do that for both of our vocations. If either of us was not involved in an open, thorough, prayerful, analytical search for ways of pursuing together our separate and common vocation we couldn't find our way forward. You see, I am as committed to Richard's vocation as he is to mine. I desperately want Richard to be in the right place, I want him to use the gifts that he's been given and to express these gifts. So I could say, "OK, go where it seems right for you and I'll give up my job and I'll just find something", but he feels the same about me as I feel about him and so he'll say, "But if you do that you'll be unhappy, you'll be frustrated, it won't work." And we go on and on saying that to each other and go round in circles but then you need somebody else to come in and say, "Look, that's ridiculous. You can't co-operate in that way. You can't say in order for one to be fulfilled, the other one has got to be unfulfilled. There has to be a way in which you can both find a degree of fulfilment." And that is what we are seeking.

Another thing of importance that came out of our work with you and Avec has to do with building communities. I haven't been on the forefront of community activities for some time but the work in Muswell Hill, particularly the way in which ideas are developed and become projects, has been profoundly affected by our experience with Avec. I'm thinking of something which Richard is involved in at the moment. He had an idea for a Christian Arts Festival in Muswell Hill and took this to the Muswell Hill Christian Council of Churches. It has just taken off, it's gathered a momentum of its own, but the way he's enabled this to happen deflects the glory from him. It's not Richard's Arts Festival, it is Muswell Hill's Christian Council's Arts Festival. I can see the advantages of that very clearly, but there is part of me which says, "Don't you realise that it is all down to him that this is happening?" But another part of me says, "Isn't it wonderful that if Richard was taken out of this situation today this Arts Festival would actually carry on?" The way he has involved other people and worked with them has given it a life of its own which is dependent on all of them and none of them. And he did a similar thing with the North London training fortnight, which again was his idea and he started it off. He now seems to have the insight to know where to plant the seeds of ideas and then how to enable them to grow without him actually standing over watering them and digging them up to see if the roots are there. So for us I can see how that has had a community outworking. I'm only just realising as I talk that this is the first time I've articulated it in this way.

There was, however, another example that caused him great pain. He was able to work through that experience with someone who had also been on an Avec course. Richard was helped to see that he had made assumptions that proved to be false. It was Richard's idea and it never actually became "their" idea in the same way that the Arts Festival and the Training Fortnight and other things did.

So, that bad experience, properly analysed, was actually used for good in order to inform similar kinds of projects in the future. It could have left him with a massive loss of confidence and a reluctance to introduce new ideas at all. But it didn't do that. He worked through it and the pain and in a similar situation in Muswell Hill he seems to have got things right.

Observations and Impressions

Over the years I have been privileged to work with many people on two things, their work and its development and their vocation and its development. These conversations brought those experiences into sharp focus and caused me to think again about their significance. For years I have thought in terms of "work consultancy" in the way I described in Chapter One. Now I am thinking in terms of "work and vocational consultancy" – note, vocational consultancy, not vocational guidance. The conversation with Diane shows the enormous value of consultancies which span both work and vocation, providing, that is, that they are differentiated. Helping people to analyse and design their work allows consultants to get to know them as workers, reflective practitioners, and gives them insights into their sense of vocation. This informs in a profound manner consultations about their vocation. In turn this informs subsequent work consultancy.

The effect upon their marriage and their personal relationships of studying their work together took Diane and Richard by surprise. ("That's perhaps not something you would expect to happen through work consultancy...") This indicates the value of an approach which focuses on the actualities of work situations in the context of the vocational and relational systems of which they are, or should be, an integral part. Whilst the approach centres on work, it takes into account relationships with people and God which make up the context. To use the jargon, the approach is systematically work-centred. Focussing on marriage is unlikely to have had the same effects. Their full and generous acceptance of each other's vocation is something very special.

What Diane says about the need to work at and to vocation and not simply "looking for the next thing" and pursuing a career structure I find moving. Reflecting on one's calling, allowing it to reveal more and more of itself, refining it and using it as a touchstone for ministry is an antidote to ministries of convenience and to careerism, both of which are bedevilling influences in church and society.

Pursuing dual vocations within a marriage is demanding and rewarding for the couple and for the Church. They have to work hard, separately and together, to make things work well for all concerned. Richard's new job is based in Gloucester, Diane's in London. So they have a new round of difficulties to sort out in order to pursue their separate and joint vocations.

There is much to learn from the missionary transition courses of the kind described that could help people facing other forms of culture shock, for instance, that experienced by moving from one circuit to another and one job to another.

Richard's experience of sharing ideas with others so that they "possess" them calls for humility and the maturity to allow others to take the credit, to have "the glory".



**Three:
A NEW WORK CULTURE
Brian Woodcock**

Brian Woodcock is a minister in the United Reformed Church. From 1965, when he became the minister of Great Harwood Congregational Church in Lancashire, he has given himself to local ministry. In 1970 he became a member of a Presbyterian and Anglican team ministry on Lockleaze Council Estate in Bristol which was putting community development theory into practice. Then in 1974 he became the minister of St Mark's, a United Reformed Church and Methodist Church in Greenwich. During his seventeen years ministry the church developed a major multi-sided community scheme and built up a large team of full and part-time, paid and voluntary workers to staff it. The scheme included a community centre, a hostel for young adults, many of whom had problems, and flats for elderly people on the same site as St Mark's. He became very actively involved in Greenwich and the social issues related to an inner city kind of area with much deprivation.

Then in 1991 he became the minister of Trinity United Reformed/Methodist Church and Alcester Street Methodist Church in Redditch, a town south of Birmingham. Brian says that his church situation "is a fairly liberated one". Trinity, to which he refers, is a town centre church and community centre, a Citizens' Advice Bureau, youth advice centre and all kinds of high profile organizations which form part of the centre. The Methodist/United Reformed Church team of which he is part is responsible for both churches.

Brian's first direct contact with Avec was in 1977 but he first came across the non-directive approach through the Lockleaze Team. He attended several courses. From 1982 he became one of Avec's most active Associates. He conducted courses, helped to provide consultancy services and contributed much to the development of Avec as a service agency.

Brian is a warm outgoing person with an enormous capacity to reflect and see things in new and exciting ways. He gives himself without reserve to those with whom he engages. His enormous energy and concentration enable him to penetrate deep into human and spiritual experiences and issues. He has enormous compassion and sympathy for people and a passion for justice. Catherine Widdicombe interviewed Brian.

Brian Woodcock's Reflections, April 1994

When I was interviewed in 1974 for the Lockleaze Team I was asked whether I knew what the non-directive approach was. I had never heard of it but I got the job. Working in this team in Bristol I quickly began to learn the skills, the outlook and the concepts of working *with* people rather than *for* them. That helped me to understand the mistakes I had made in my previous church, my first appointment. I was sent on a course on leading discussion groups. I began to understand how to work to a group rather than leading it by the nose. When I moved to Greenwich I got in touch with Avec.

We had been at Greenwich a fairly short time when we found ourselves considering a major new development in the life of the church which led to a complete upheaval. Suddenly it became very important for me to reflect on the way I was working and how I was going to help a group of people to face major change. Avec was a life-saver at that stage.

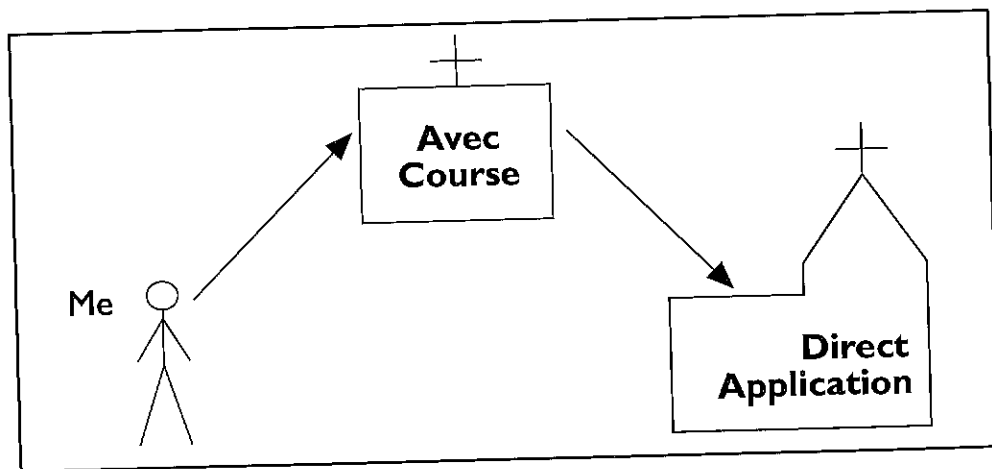
I think I still had a lot in me of wanting to jump in and do things myself. I felt responsible for making things succeed. Those things are part of my nature. They are still with me a bit. At the time they were with me quite a lot. Avec helped me to think things through. In turn I was able to help us as a group to stand back from what we were throwing ourselves into, to reflect on ourselves, to stand outside ourselves, to ask ourselves what we were trying to do and to enable people to consider the various answers and approaches suggested. That is something I could never have done before being involved with Avec.

We were right in the middle of considering what we were going to do with this new project when I went to an Avec course. I was helped to see how we could begin to sort out all the things that had to be done and to put them into a programme. I went back to a major meeting at St Mark's and reproduced, on a large sheet of paper, the diagram that had helped me on the course, in order to help the people at the meeting sort things out and make a programme with a time schedule. It was quite helpful but I got a backlash a few weeks later when I went to another meeting. People were saying, "You go on these courses and suddenly you start to behave in a different way. You never did diagrams before. We want you to be yourself, we don't want you to do all this." They were actually quite angry. It put me back a long way in terms of being able to use the things that I had got from Avec because I felt I was under suspicion. I think in all the years that I continued to be in Greenwich, which was probably another twelve years after that, there were some things that we could well have benefited from that I just couldn't do because I still felt that that moment had been remembered when I had come back and done Avec "neat". It was always hard to put up diagrams, and even getting people into groups was resisted at times. Sometimes there were conflicts and at times people, and one person in particular,

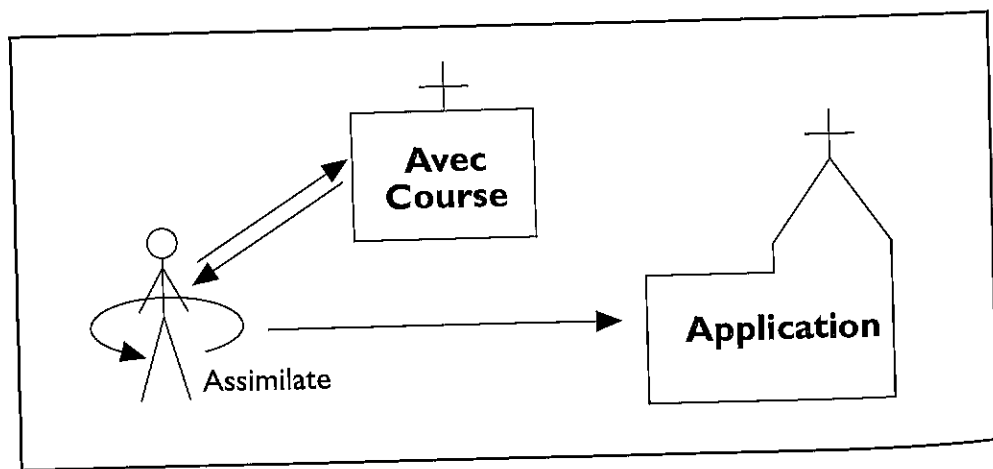
who had initially objected, stood outside what we tried to do. Somehow, with one or two people, we just never got over how I mishandled things at that early stage. The other thing I was never actually able to quite work out was how you deal with strong-minded, powerful people who block the rest of the group. They would be the same people basically. The importance of actually getting alongside key controlling type people at an early stage has really come home to me since. If I raise their suspicions I may never be able to overcome them again.

Instead of coming from my working situation to apply Avec, I should have gone back to myself to internalise what Avec was about and make it me, or to discover what of that was me. Then it would have been the me who had grown and developed a bit as a result of Avec that would have gone to my working situation. I wouldn't have looked as if I was coming as a representative of some outside organization to them.

Later, in an attempt to help people on a course to avoid making the same mistake I drew two diagrams to represent this experience. The first was about my going on an Avec course and returning to implement all the things I had learnt in the way I had learnt them.



The other diagram illustrates what I should have done, internalise and apply.



I did internalise what I got from Avec. You can't help but do so just by living with it. But I think what I internalised was the ethos and culture of Avec actually. I think this is a thing about the way I operate. I found Avec skills courses quite difficult. Becoming self-conscious about skills I find extremely difficult. I can only relax when I am being me rather than thinking, "Am I doing this correctly?" What I internalised that worked was the culture of this very human way of working non-directively, valuing one another, a kind of befriending operation almost. That was the change in me that was effective in St Mark's. That was how I grew in relationship with the people I was working with.

In the early days I did help to staff skills practice courses. That was okay. But if I'm honest, what I'm really comfortable with are Avec work paper sessions and getting a group of people to empathise with a person whose work is being considered. Flying by the seat of my pants in terms of responding to what's coming up at that time is what I'm really happiest with. Sometimes it doesn't really work but very often it does. What I am doing is coming from inside me and I am able to draw things from inside other people as well. Conducting a skills practice session, for instance, helping a group of people to develop their ability to lead a discussion, I find a very exacting exercise and I am not a very exacting kind of person, I think, in that sense. A lot of people would find it the other way round.

Entering into the work of somebody whose situation you have never known before can be exciting and daunting. It involves, for instance, exploring ramifications of the situation and the worker's emotions, difficulties or sense of failure or muddle. You wonder whether you are going to get caught up in the pain or muddle or be lost by your ignorance about the details. At times I am aware of my ignorance. Often I am not sure what to do next. But I don't have to be the resource, the resource is the group. In a work paper session that becomes very obvious. My job in enabling the process is to help other people to bring out their resources. Then there is great excitement when someone suddenly sees his or her working situation as they have never seen it before. To share that excitement is exhilarating and a privilege. I find these sessions give me life.

All this is about being on the staff but I have often been on the receiving end. I never felt nervous about it. I have always felt affirmed. The principle emotion was one of being valued and cherished by a group of people who were giving their time to me and concentrating on my work and my concerns. I don't think I had ever before experienced that. So, you suddenly feel, "My goodness, I'm quite important and what I'm doing really seems to matter." Another feeling is that you are being given a chance to talk about what you are doing and you begin to get things out of your system often in a diagram or chart on a piece of paper. Therefore your work is forced to take on some kind of order as you explain it to somebody else. Often I have to draw a diagram to do that. Now that may never have happened before. That is the thing that struck me.

I remember one particular session. In order to illustrate my situation I drew a diagram. It showed St Mark's, a URC and Methodist Church, the hierarchical systems of the two denominations, the centre that was being created, and the residential block, and so on. To make it really clear that I was being a supportive non-directive person, I put myself at the bottom of the picture with all these things over me.

Suddenly somebody said looking at the diagram, "You're carrying everything." I had never seen it like that before. What I had drawn became a "disclosure" diagram. Explaining my situation revealed something to others, and through them to me, that I had never seen before. Now that was wonderful. It can be a shock, but it can suddenly make a whole lot of things click into place at once. That was of great importance. Another thing I learnt from being on the receiving end is how important it is that the group, particularly the person leading the group, the staff member, is constantly checking back that things that are emerging are real to the person whose work paper is being looked at. I find myself wanting to please the group and say, "Yes, yes, this is great", in other words, "You are doing really well for me folks." Then suddenly I am left with a whole lot of things I feel I have got to do that I don't know that I can handle, or a suggestion that is not the way I would have done it. I think that this is the really delicate bit. The whole group can be enthusiastic and get carried away and say, "This is the way to do it and so on, this is the way forward." I have begun by being quite clear about the way forward and ended by being lost - everyone else seemed to know my work better than I knew it myself! So that is a great danger.

On one occasion I was finding it extremely difficult to really see my way through a whole lot of issues that were pressing in on me and we had struggled with this long and hard in a work paper group. George Lovell was leading it. We didn't crack it, so the next day we had a second session. George began to draw out on a piece of paper some of his thinking that he had done overnight. I did what I had been doing all week because of the muddle I felt I was in at that particular stage and said, "Yes, but it's not like this." George "blew a fuse" and said, "I've been up most of the night trying to sort this out and now you come out with a new bit of information that we didn't have before." I shall never forget that. I felt quite guilty, but at that same time I had to be honest you see. I had not thought to give this information before. It had just occurred to me now. The temptation to allow the staff member, George, to have his way because he had done so much work for me was immense. When you are the person whose work paper is being looked at you are aware of the amount of time, energy and skill that is being invested by staff members and you know that you are also occupying the attention of a group of people. The desire to please is quite immense. If people become impatient with you because you cannot say, "Yes that's exactly where I am", that is an additional factor. I am labouring this point a bit but I think it's quite an issue actually. It's very, very difficult sometimes to ensure that the person whose work is being considered feels really comfortable with what is emerging. When a person is not clear or muddled about his/her situation it can be a hard and long process getting a group to empathise and to be there with that person and not to take the thing out of the hands of the person. Simply because the person is unclear and muddled, it is all the more important because that is part of the situation that is being considered: the muddle.

What I have learnt is to go quite slowly. To check back during sessions. To talk to the person after the session and to find out whether what emerged feels "real". To watch body language. And I have learnt that when I feel an affection for the person, a love for the person, I begin to feel some of the things that that person feels. That takes me into a deeper dimension than understanding their thinking, it is feeling their feelings. That helps me to stand with that person in that person's feelings, hurts

and diffidence. If I don't feel them, I can easily override them or allow the group to do so. That means we override where that person is and what that person's doing and going through.

So far I have been talking about the use of the *avec* approach on courses. This is only one way in which I use it. I use it in my work because there is no other way for me now. It is right and just. Justice is about the empowerment of the people with whom we work as professionals. At times I find myself doing some work with social workers and community workers who really believe in this. Nonetheless they want the protection of being a professional. They can feel quite threatened about giving their clients or groups a voice in case it conflicts with what they want or undermines their authority. Now I think that is actually about justice and I think it is not very well recognized still. It is as hard to get it recognized amongst left-wing groups as right-wing groups, which I find quite surprising in some ways, but it's true in my experience. For me it's become an article of faith that I must find ways of working with people which frees them to be themselves, helps them to discover who they are and enables them to give of themselves with their skills to the solutions that are right for them and what they have within them. That is as true in working with individuals as it is with working with groups of people, church groups and community groups. I don't know of any other way than the way that I have learnt through *Avec* that so effectively enables people to believe in themselves and to apply themselves to their working situations.

So I struggle with the resistance that I always seem to face. Sometimes we do make progress. I can give you a couple of examples. One is where I worked with a multi-discipline group on a housing estate who were trying to help the tenants of that estate to develop a life for their area and to attract resources to an under-resourced area in Greenwich. I got them to imagine they were visiting a client on the estate. Once in the flat they were to imagine that they changed places with the client. Then they had to look at themselves, the social worker or whoever they were, and to answer two questions: "What did they think of the person who had visited them?" "How did they feel about the person?" At the end of this imaginative exercise the workers said how uneasy they had felt. They had not liked "looking" at themselves from the point of view of their client. But it actually got us looking at the needs of the estate from the viewpoint of the client rather than from the viewpoint of the social workers wanting to help the clients. Eventually the point was seen. We certainly made progress. The line of action that came out at the end of the day was quite different from the way people had been thinking at the beginning. We were crossing the threshold of the defences that the full-time professional workers had put up, and felt they had legitimately put up, which were preventing them from seeing the real needs of the clients.

The other instance was also in Greenwich but a much bigger project. The churches were asked by the Borough Council to help assess the effectiveness of the delivery of social services in their area. We set up a conference for professional workers and for their client groups as well. The Borough was very happy with this and gave us lots of resources. We then decided that this particular consultation would be steered not by the professionals but by various client groups. That was just about okay. But

then, as they became more involved in the preparation for the day, some of the client groups said that they didn't actually want the professionals in the group at all. They felt that they would be threatening to them, they felt they wouldn't be able to be themselves and to say the things that were on their minds. At that point the people who were resourcing this from the Town Hall began to raise questions about whether our conference was at all legitimate, whether they could allow it to happen in the Town Hall and whether in fact we had overstepped our brief. In fact we were very close to our brief because we were now going to find out what the delivery of services was really like. Suddenly the people who felt they were "in charge" and who asked for a critique, felt themselves being put on the line. They were very unhappy about this. Now it simply showed to me that the Borough people actually wanted to remain in control and that, in the end, by remaining in control, they were preventing themselves from hearing the things that they most needed to hear.

However, in the end they allowed it to go ahead. It was very enlightening but they were just very uneasy about it. *Faith in the City* (The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas) was in the news. Maybe that was one of the reasons why they had turned to the churches. And they trusted Graham Ghaleb, the Church Related Community Worker at St Mark's. Graham had helped me to see the implications of what we were doing and I was then able to argue very strongly for it. Whether they trusted me or not I don't know, but they were not able to knock down my arguments. They wanted to know about delivery of social services and there was no reason why the church should know that. To get a group of church people together to make comments on it was pointless. To say that we could have free access to the senior social workers and so on was keeping the whole thing in the hands of the controlling people. That wasn't going to tell us about delivery of social services. So the logic of listening to the clients was very easy to justify and in the end they just had to accept it for this exercise. Whether in the long-term this actually changed the relationship between Borough people, professionals and their client groups, I have no idea. Regrettably as a nation we had moved into a whole different philosophy about relationships between professionals and clients in the much more controlling political atmosphere that had evolved. This was affecting the way that community workers were allowed to work in all sorts of ways. People's jobs were on the line. If they spent too much time they were seen to be "pandering to their clients". They were expected to be actually under the authority of their line managers. We were in a much more hierarchical society. Nonetheless I think that very important insights had been produced for professional workers by our project.

When I moved to Redditch in October 1991 I was doubting whether I could work in an *avec* kind of way at certain levels because I had not been able to do it at Greenwich, but it just fell into place. When I was interviewed for the appointment I made it very clear that this was the way I wanted to work and what I felt about the work I did with *Avec* and the way in which it constantly renewed my own skills and outlook. Redditch people were happy with this, ready for it and, I think, wanted it. So the way was open for me to work with people and from the start to ask about the purpose of this church in the centre of the town. They wanted to sit down and work it out. For the first time I was not only able to do what I wanted to do but I saw it being welcomed and working. It was great.

Only last night I found myself with a group of people from our church and the Anglican church looking at our relationships using *avec* processes. Something I had not been able to do in that way in twelve years or so in Greenwich where I had got off on the wrong foot. That had knocked my confidence. I went into this new situation believing I could do it. In New Age Movement terms I got into the "wrong energy" with people and in terms of working for growth in Greenwich. No matter what I tried, certain things would always be suspect; I would always be defensive trying to do things in certain ways; I would always be expecting the worst and I wouldn't be disappointed. I went to Redditch expecting the best and finding that the way opened up. Now some of that is inside me and some of it is the real situation. I don't think I am able to separate the two. That's why I say I was in the wrong energy. It is the only way I can think of describing it. It is almost as if it was something that's bigger than St Mark's and me which we had created between us and couldn't get out of. It doesn't seem to be there in Redditch. But it is also about going into a new situation with confidence and feeling that I can do it here. You go ahead and do it and once it begins to roll you can carry on with it.

Early in the discussions I discovered that the Redditch church was having major problems. Difficult relationships and factions were affecting people and ministers alike. An unhappy no-win situation had developed. Some were leaving and all were feeling helpless. But I felt sure I could work there - whereas in Greenwich relationships were basically happy yet there were certain things I couldn't do.

During the time I was thinking about moving to Redditch I just happened to be helping with the staffing of a ten-day *Avec* course. The members wanted to look at the question of conflict. One group decided to do so by looking at what I felt I would be walking into in Redditch. So we had a work paper session on it. I explained what I understood to be the situation and the history of it. I drew a diagram showing how it looked to me then. This diagram caused the group to see it in quite a different way simply because of the way they saw it depicted on the piece of paper. They helped me to see all kinds of implications in the situation I was going to that I hadn't seen before. Quite wild ones really. It was a disclosure diagram for them and for me. It suggested various models to us about parenting, nurturing and death and resurrection. These models helped us to list a whole range of things that would help me to work with these people: I must not be associated exclusively with one faction or another; I must be warm in relating to these people and establish trust; I must not allow things to be projected onto me that belonged to the personalities and the events of previous people. Also the group led me to see, for example, that the Redditch people needed to be able to celebrate and affirm one another, possibly away from their premises. They needed times away for space and retreat. A whole lot of things emerged which were very, very helpful.

The great thing is that this was our client group who were doing this for me and that was an important thing for me. It was very helpful for me and it was very, very important for them, because here they were saying what can you tell us about conflict and they were actually telling me things about conflict. Quite brilliant. One of the things this shows is that anyone can use the approach given trust, humanity and humility. They were released to do it when a staff member was prepared to change

places with them and make himself vulnerable. Going back to what I said earlier, one of the most important things about Avec for me is its culture not its skills. The skills are important but its culture is something about humanity, humility and warmth and trust. When those conditions are present people are freed. I've never quite thought about it like this before. But it's important because personalities are a most important part of the conditions.

I am sure that a lot of what I have got out of Avec is to do with first of all having got a great deal from George and Catherine, from feeling great warmth, respect and inspiration from them. Then people who have been on the courses with me have been people like that. You begin to see the depths in other people as well, But am I talking about personalities or am I talking about culture? I'm not sure. Put different people in leadership positions in Avec for instance, or that way of working, and you can get quite a different culture. People, for instance, who are primarily concerned about methodology or who are defensive or who wouldn't allow themselves to be vulnerable. Then I think the whole feel of the skills and the methods of Avec changes, it somehow becomes colder and it can become exacting and threatening. Then, the use of the non-directive approach, rather than relaxing people, really makes them feel edgy. And rather than helping them to feel, "My goodness, I've got gifts and skills here and things to offer" makes them feel "I've got nothing." So the non-directive way becomes a threat rather than an opportunity.

When I came into Avec the non-directive approach wasn't really terribly well known around the Church. Now it is. I think people want to work in this way but sometimes people use the "right" methods but in ways that aren't, in my opinion, terribly helpful. It can at times put people down, for instance, I don't think deliberately. Leaders can feel that if you find the right gimmick you can do anything. Therefore working with groups and running meetings is seen as a kind of a game and if you can understand the clues of the game then you can really do great things. People who don't understand the clues can be made to feel devalued. But it's not a game; that removes it from real life. There is something holistic about what I found in the culture of the *avec* approach. It is about the whole person and the whole society, and the inter-connections between what you are doing in your organization and many other factors within the community and the society in which that organization is operating. The whole thing is of a piece. Now to change this into a series of methods which you can pick up from a filing cabinet or a tool or resource box is to completely misunderstand what it's about. There are times when I think none of the actual skills and, perhaps skills is the wrong word, that none of the methods that we used in Avec are necessary. What is necessary is to treat people in a particular kind of way with a particular sort of respect and with a belief that the people are a resource and that the answers don't have to come from the outside. That is what really matters I think.

Perhaps I shouldn't have said that the skills aren't necessary. The skills are important but the methods and devices are not necessarily important, you could find other methods providing they are consistent with the attitudes I have described. For instance, to decide that a meeting should tackle a piece of work and divide into groups of a certain number and address things in a particular well-tested way, might be very helpful. But there are probably other ways of doing it as well. Dividing into

groups may not be right for a certain set of people. For me in Greenwich certain methods were blocked, so I had to find other ways of doing things. But the important thing is that you are still dealing with people as people, and that you're not imposing things upon them. You remain true to the attitudes and approaches I have described and try to understand what will work for the people, not what will work for the leader. That is the important thing in the end.

Anybody, I believe, providing they are being themselves, can probably use the *avec* approach. But what gets in the way is refusing to really acknowledge who you are and to level with yourself and other people. And they won't be able to do so if they are into controlling, if they stay in their ivory tower, if they will not give of themselves and if they won't allow themselves to be vulnerable.

Now the great thing for me is that everything I have found in Avec fits in with my beliefs. Things that are very important to me are to do with liberation, being open, humility, serving and affirming, it's all those things. Passages like Jesus saying, "You know that in the world rulers lord it over their subjects... That is not the way with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all." Now that to me is absolutely central to what the Christian faith is about and it is central to what I believe. And this is how I understand *avec* really. It is about helping people to be themselves in quite self-effacing ways. It is about being true to yourself but it is not about keeping yourself intact and coming out on top. Really, in the end, it doesn't matter what happens to you. What matters is what happens to the group and you are there to allow it to happen. That to me is the way of Christ. It's deep and spiritual, so I think that that focuses for me my theology and how it relates to *avec*.

There is one other thing that I would say, which is, that my own theological development has become more and more right side of the brain, intuitive, open to other faiths and thoughts, less and less doctrinal in terms of making sure that I am staying within the correct orthodox boundaries. I think that Avec also has developed to some extent along these lines over the years. I think that when it began it was very clearly work-orientated in the sense that it was head rather than heart. I think that we were clear that it was rational, that we weren't going to get into things that were about feelings, and would stay a million miles away from things like T-groups and all that sort of thing. I think that is still right. We were conscious of the need to be rational and objective and all that. Now I think we have actually moved much more into feelings and into intuition and we have been prepared to begin to use, in some of our sessions, things that were helping people to make connections at deeper levels than rational levels. I'm glad about that, because it means that Avec's journey is also my journey. Although my journey is to some extent to want to explore things which are nothing to do with "work" and they are about being rather than doing and all that sort of thing, I am still able to say that those committed to the *avec* approach understand what that's about.

I'll tell you how my other explorations help me in terms of working at the *avec* approach. When I am working one to one with people at some kind of depth, I find myself drawing on my spiritual right side of the brain resources and I also find myself drawing on the skills that I have got from the *avec* approach about seeing people and

situations diagrammatically, and being able to make diagrams, and standing outside the situation, and helping that person to stand outside and look objectively at various things and their connections. So I draw on both sides of the brain. I don't know whether I can actually say that the *avec* way helps my spiritual journey. It may do.

My other resource is the Iona Community, which is about political commitment partly and about making connections between prayer and politics, work and faith and building community in difficult places. I have used *avec* ways of working to help me to be a resource in Iona Community and I have used Avec work paper sessions to help me with things that I have been trying to do in the Iona Community. So there has been an interchange between my various resources. In fact for a time I ran a community development sub-group in the Iona Community.

Unfortunately the *avec* approach is suspect. I think it's less so than it was because what non-directive work is about is more widely recognized than it used to be. At the end of the day there is an orthodoxy in the Church at large and I find it in the URC as much as in other denominations, which is a bit like what I said originally about social workers being defensive. It is that, "We know what we are about", and it gets a bit dangerous if you begin to open up this too much and allow everybody to have a say. I'd say there is a bit of fear of working bottom-up.

The kind of experiences that people had on Avec courses gave them the resources and the motivation to help people to re-think their church life, the work they are doing, their faith, and to re-define their beliefs. At the end of the day this is actually very threatening to the hierarchy of the Church. Furthermore, if you "give" people the right to think, maybe they will decide that they simply do not want to do what they are being asked to do as a church locally by the Church nationally. That is a very worrying possibility for institutions. So if a church decided, to take a really radical example, that what it ought to do was to close, and to disperse its people amongst community groups to work in different ways in the community, that would be in total conflict with what the institution was asking its ministers to promote as it put them into leadership positions. I'm being very extreme. I don't know of anyone who has actually done that. But the *avec* approach opens up a lot of possibilities between that extreme and what the churches expect of ministers in terms of building up the congregation and the faithful and therefore statistics. Listening to other people and their beliefs, recognising that God is not just in the Church, but in the community, working with atheists and Buddhists or whoever in order to find a common purpose, can appear quite heretical, if not in terms of doctrines certainly in terms of the interests of the institution. Now I think the Church can be quite uneasy with that. There are methods of community work that the Church is happy with because it is the controlling agent. The *avec* approach raises questions about the value and validity of that. It also raises questions about manipulative approaches. Sometimes I feel that church leaders are into manipulation in quite a big way, evangelism can be too. So for these reasons, I think Avec and *avec* ways of working are watched a bit carefully at times. Avec was an organization which ought to have been affirmed but it was sometimes clobbered instead. It should have been really well resourced by people within the institution who know how much it has helped them but it doesn't necessarily seem to work

that way. I'm not sure why, but it's just a thing I've detected sometimes. In the URC a number a number of people have had the experience of an Avec course, but very few ministers. Therefore it's not understood sometimes. A comment that was made to me once was, "People set up organizations like Avec. They think that they know what's best for us in the Church. Then they are appealing to us for money to keep it going." That is a very cynical way of looking at the kind of instrument for development that Avec was within the life of the Church.

What I haven't talked about is going out to churches and organizations as a consultant. It is a different dynamic from that generated by a group of individuals from different churches and organizations (or even from the same ones, as occasionally happened) coming on a course and studying their situations through work paper sessions. In some ways I find it more demanding. When people came on an Avec course, in a way the onus was on them to try to make the connections about why they were there and what they were taking part in and what they were expecting from it. They had to try to understand the language and the concepts. We did our best to make these as available as possible and, as I said earlier, to understand them. Essentially they came to Avec and entered into its organization and culture.

In consultancy work with churches and organizations we went into their organization. The onus was much more upon us to try to be where they were, to understand them, their language and their history. They had things in common, we were visitors. So the whole thing is the other way round somehow. We went to them, whereas on courses they came to us. I found it quite challenging. I found myself wanting to gain acceptance from the group of people in a way that I wouldn't really be thinking about if people were coming on a course. I was not thinking, "Is this and that person understanding and is this person in sympathy?" I was looking for group understanding, sympathy and acceptance in order to be comfortable working with them. I have never thought about it until just now but I think that is why it felt so different even though both groups are trying to come to terms with each other's culture and the interaction between them.

It has been a great privilege to be involved in the corporate delight from people in an organization who felt they were beginning to move forward. I never ever felt that I had done something spectacular for them. I felt very much like a small instrument trying to make something available. In fact the whole thing was very humbling I think because I was aware of the strength of the group in such things.

The work that we did for the Shaftesbury Society was quite interesting. We had to get to know the building and the locality and make a lot of rapid judgements about what it was all about. Quickly we had to tailor ourselves and what we were bringing to the situation and to where people were. On location you can't be very academic about things. You're right in the grass roots, and in some senses you begin to feel it. I remember feeling, "I don't know whether we are going to get much progress here really." But every little thing that happened was highly appreciated. There was great progress and at the end of two days, people said they were being helped a lot. We, in turn, were deeply impressed by the high commitment of the people who were involved to their local situation and what they were doing with it. In a community organization like that you are not dealing with a group of professionals but with the

ordinary people that make up that local community. One of the challenges was that we had to be much more down to earth. We couldn't be too sophisticated, we couldn't assume that people have been on any kind of training course for anything before. It's much more demanding in terms of really having to make the thing of value to people there and then. At the end of the day it felt more real, I think, because we were in context, we were not speaking with a group of leaders who had to take whatever they got back home.

Having done the occasional consultancy of this sort, I find myself being called upon to run consultations of various sorts in church and community situations in England and in Scotland. Often I go wondering, "Now, do I have the wherewithal to cope with something like this?" particularly if I am going on my own. Generally I discover that it really wasn't difficult at all. Once you're able to get people to listen to one another, to describe their situation, to spend time reflecting, which they may never have done before, then ways forward begin to emerge. My *avec* instincts normally know how to respond. It is very, very difficult but necessary to prepare in advance. You can have some conversations with the person calling you in, but at the end of the day what is really demanded in that situation will probably be described at the start of the session by the people who have not been together before for this kind of purpose. Frequently preparation has to be put aside because a different brief comes out. So you are flying by the seat of your pants a lot.

There is only one occasion when I felt that I got unstuck. It was in St Ives, Huntingdon. It was about, "What kind of groups do we need to set up in our church in order to tackle the sort of things that we feel we are being drawn into if we develop as a church in relation to the community?" I worked out a possible format for the evening with local leaders. It included various options according to how things might develop and what people might require. An open invitation had been given. About 30 people were expected. In the event nearer a hundred turned up! I couldn't think on my feet quickly enough to re-jig it. So we tended to go through the format that we had decided and it was just impossible really. Too much stuff came up, too many people were meeting in groups, the feedback from small working groups just took too long. Oddly enough, the people were reasonably happy. It gave them something to work with but I felt we didn't use the time and opportunity well. I should have prepared for different sized groups.

The first Meeting of the Avec training Associates that I went to was in 1982. The future of Avec was up for grabs. This was the first of many crises. Between us we made major commitments quite spontaneously because we suddenly saw the importance of Avec to the life of the Church and what a tragedy it would be if it disappeared. Associates began to take responsibility for Avec. Howard Mellor headed up a major campaign for raising funds. To come in on that note was actually a quantum leap as far as I was concerned from being on the receiving end of Avec to suddenly finding I was being asked to help with courses and thinking, "Surely they are not talking about me." But I felt I had a part to play in the organization and I stepped across the line from receiver to participant in the life of Avec as an organization. Since then I have felt highly committed to it, it's part of me. I don't know of another organization that has anything quite like the Associates of Avec.

I wouldn't have missed that experience but it was difficult to find time often to do some of the most fundamental things like sitting down and reading the work papers that people have sent in beforehand. Sometimes it was not even possible to really begin to get my mind on a course that was about to happen until I'd got away from Greenwich or from Redditch in order to be there ready for this group of people who are going to descend on us because there were too many more other calls. To block time wasn't possible. To take a week out actually creates such a head of steam before and after that it's even more difficult than normal. But there were positives. Whenever I helped I was aware how much was being given to me. Helping to run a 10-day course was very close to being on the receiving end of one as far as I was concerned. I have quite often said when I've been urged to go on in-service training courses that staffing 10-day courses was my in-service training. I negotiated my involvement in Avec with the Redditch church on the understanding that "you will benefit from me running courses at Avec".

Avec is a treasure that mustn't be lost. Regardless of what happens to Avec as an organization, there are qualities, insights, a treasury of knowledge all of which is of tremendous value for the Church at large. I don't think there are other people doing anything which is quite the same as what Avec did. There is something quite authentic about the way that people work together in an *avec* context, in terms of growth and honesty and humanity and humanness which really makes me feel this is what the Church is about. The Church must learn from what has been experienced in Avec, however long Avec continues as an organization.

Being involved in Avec has been a great value to me as a person. I have received a lot and I've grown a lot through Avec and the issues it caused me to face and struggle with, and the ways of being able to stand back, not just from my working situation, but from myself and my life, in order to look and assess, set targets and to think laterally. I think I am quite a different person because of my involvement with Avec.

Observations and Impressions

Brian Woodcock's ability to move from being a consultant to being a consultor with the same group of people is an impressive aspect of this telling story so full of insights. Writ large in the work force this attribute enhances the quality of work and the job satisfaction experienced by workers. Peers and colleagues who have it are able to act as co-consultants to each other in the work place by moving into and out of consultant and consultor roles as required. This makes consultancy help much more readily available as and when it is needed. Extending this practice to other working relationships, for instance between people with different degrees of authority and power in an organization, is highly desirable. Building up such consultancy infrastructures, not to replace but to complement specialist consultancy services such as those provided by Avec, is essential if the needs are to be met and appraisal schemes are to be adequately resourced.

Avec work paper sessions were excellent training for this kind of flexibility. Over a period of two weeks each person acted in the same group as consultor (up to six times) and with others as a consultant (up to twenty times). The memory of the experience of being a consultor was so fresh that it informed the experience of being

a consultant and vice versa. A short series of work paper sessions was, therefore, an intensive learning process.

Flexibility of this kind is a product of humility, openness, a relentless search for deeper understanding and an insatiable desire for the kind of help which previous experience has proved will enhance your work performance and help you develop as a worker. Brian's story admirably illustrates these attributes in action: the very act of telling it generated new insights, raised questions to be explored and, at times, was the launching pad to a consultancy session! In turn this flexibility has its own products. It continuously demonstrates that all workers periodically can benefit from consultancy help. It reminds us of a universal need. That is good for our humility. It helps to check the propensity of people to get stuck in the role of consultant. Indeed specialist consultants can feel that they should not need consultancy help, even to the point of feeling that it is a sign of professional weakness. Such feelings are perverse. Consultancy is a particular form of collaboration which invariably shows that "two minds are better than one" when they are working in non-directive harmony.

This story also shows how easy it is for consultors to feel obliged to go along with things about which they are uneasy, especially when they are not able to give reasons for their unease. Consultors can be left behind feeling quite out of it when imaginative ideas, which don't gel with them, carry consultants and consultancy groups on a flight of fantasy. I know, because I have experienced it as a consultor and I have done it as a consultant! In effect it can be an act of imposition unwittingly carried out by those committed to non-directive action. On the other hand, this book started its life with such an experience. My Research Support Group suggested it. I connected with it intellectually but not emotionally, not least because work in which I had invested heavily was pushed aside as the group got excited about this project. I felt devastated and angry until I caught up with the idea and found it worked! Initial unease of consultors must be taken seriously but of itself it is not always a reliable guide.

Wanting to show genuine gratitude, as Brian so clearly points out, is a subtle persuader to accept suggestions with which you are uncomfortable and which are not in your interests. A telling and somewhat painful example for me of this is in the incident when Brian says I "blew a fuse". I remember the incident well although until I read the transcript of the interview I did not know how strongly he felt about it. As I recall it, every attempt to depict the essentials of the situation produced new information which, at times one felt, could have been given earlier. Having worked into the early hours I thought I had cracked it! What is salutary for me is the realization of the devastating effect of indicating, admittedly with annoyance and frustration but without loss of temper, that we should have been given the new information earlier and of adding the gratuitous remark about how long I had been working at things. Both statements were professionally inept. My overnight work called forth the new information which led to a way forward. This is a common experience. It justified my work. How long I had worked at it had no bearing on the exercise in hand. Declaring it could only have had bad effects upon our ability to work at things: in effect it rebuked, induced guilt, fished for an apology. I should have controlled my feelings and given myself to the task. Fortunately our personal relationship and mutual respect could carry this but that is not always the case.

A lesson for consultors is that they must acquire the abilities and confidence to deal creatively with such situations. Gratitude and a sense of obligation must not control their responses. A lesson for consultants is that they must avoid advertently and inadvertently inducing and using gratitude and obligation to encourage consultors to adopt particular ideas. This detracts from what they must be about: helping consultors to discover what they themselves can and must do in their situation. A lesson for those responsible for the training of ministers, religious and lay people is that they must be trained to be consultors especially in these days of appraisal and audit. A lesson for all is to acquire and practise the ability to see and feel things from the other person's point of view. T. R. Batten does this superbly and possibly that is why he is such an effective non-directive worker.

Brian's story illustrates the importance of assimilating new approaches and methods so that they are not foreign to the person and the situation and of negotiating their use with people. The story also shows the importance and difficulties of preparing people for the transition from attending courses to returning to their working situations. Most Avec courses emphasized the importance of assimilation and got people to consider good and bad ways of making the transition. But enthusiasm often carried people away. However, what is painfully clear from this story, is that the initial stages are critical in the introduction of significant work culture changes based on collaborative action and natural justice.



**Four:
FURLOUGH COURSES AND CONSULTATIONS
Rosalind Colwill**

Rosalind Colwill has worked in Nigeria for fifteen years as a missionary (they now call them mission partners). She is a Roman Catholic seconded to work with the Methodist Church Nigeria through the Overseas Division of the British Methodist Church. For nine years she was the Welfare Officer at a leprosy settlement, Uzuakoli in Eastern Nigeria. Moved by the desperate plight of mentally ill destitute people living on the streets who were often wandering around naked, she founded a therapeutic community, Amaudo in the Abia State in 1989. Amaudo and Uzuakoli have been breathtakingly successful in the rehabilitation of people in their own families and communities during a period of political instability and in an economy bedevilled by galloping inflation.

Ros, as she is commonly known, attended her first furlough course in 1984. Since then she has attended one on each of her furloughs in Britain – four in all. These courses are now to be conducted by Christians Abroad. Unfortunately there was not a course during her 1995 furlough and so she had four consultancy sessions with me over a period of six weeks.

In the interviews I had with Ros when the consultancy sessions were completed she described her work and reflected on how and why the furlough courses and consultations had been useful. She also reflected on a consultation which I led in Nigeria in 1986.

Ros Colwill is in her early forties. From her secondary school days she has been involved with people who were deprived or destitute. She decided when she was about five years of age that she wanted to be a missionary. She went to a convent school in Birmingham which was caught up in outreach to poor families and disabled and mentally ill people. When she left school she worked with the Salvation Army in Zambia to test her call. Then, whilst at University studying Social Administration and Politics, she got very involved with the single homeless in Swansea and joined the Cyrenians. Also she spent a summer working with Mother Teresa in Calcutta. After graduating she spent a year as a social worker with the social services department of a local authority in West Glamorgan, and then came a year in Bangladesh working for children with a United Protestant group and a full-time job for three years with the Cyrenians in London. Following this she went to Uzuakoli and fell in love with Nigeria.

During the interview I noted that whilst she was a Catholic she had worked with Protestant churches and was involved in the central courts of the Methodist Church Nigeria. She said:

“It is very strange really because it’s not been anything that I’ve particularly forced. It’s just been something that’s happened. It’s greatly enriched my faith. It’s made me very certain that one Christian body is what I will always work for. Denominations have very little importance in my life though very deep inside me there is always something very Catholic that will never change. One of the wonderful things about working with the Methodist Church Nigeria has been the opportunity to work very closely with an executive body about the progress and development within the church. In the Catholic Church I would not have been able to do that. That’s been absolutely fascinating and so worthwhile.”

In the recent honours list Ros was awarded an MBE “for service to the mentally ill in Nigeria”. It is little wonder that she has been described as the Mother Teresa of Nigeria.

Rosalind Colwill’s Reflections on the 12th and 24th June 1995

Attending Avec courses for missionaries on furlough has been a vitally important part of each of my furloughs in 1984, 86, 88 and 91. Sadly there was not one whilst I was here this year and so I had a series of consultancy sessions with you. Useful as they were, they’re not the same as the courses. 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. I’ve attended two or three of the annual furlough conferences for missionaries organized by the Methodist Church. But they are on a much lighter level. They are important social events which enable missionaries to meet up with one another, pray together, listen to talks, engage in Bible studies and to discuss common issues and problems. But they do not do anything approaching what we did on the furlough courses.

On the first one or two courses I studied the work in which I was engaged in Uzuakoli, a rehabilitation leprosy settlement in Nigeria. At other courses and in my discussions with you I studied my work at Amaudo Itumbauzo, a rehabilitation community for destitute mentally ill people, also in Nigeria.

Amaudo is a Christian Community where the destitute mentally ill and mentally handicapped are brought in off the streets. Up to 65 destitute mentally ill people live alongside 15 residential workers sharing their lives together, eating, working and praying together. There are opportunities for occupational therapy and vocational training in one of ten workshops. Medical treatment is available. Psychotropic drugs are used to remove the distressing delusions and hallucinations of schizophrenia from which the vast majority of residents suffer. A chaplain offers pastoral counselling.

The ethos of the centre is one which enables residents to re-learn social skills in a communal atmosphere to prepare them for reintegration with their family and rehabilitation in their community. Families are traced and a programme of reintegration includes home visits and follow-up support after discharge.

In the next village a new community exists essentially to provide a smaller family house offering long-term care to the mentally handicapped from the mother community. In addition there is a community village for residents discharged from Amaudo who have no family to return to. Members of this group live semi-independently and are economically self-sufficient in their own co-operative.

The centre has co-ordinated the setting up of a state-wide community mental health programme with trained psychiatric nurses working in each local government area of the state doing mental health education, identifying cases of mental illness and setting up treatment programmes. Both state and local government are involved in this programme. Amaudo is also involved in improving the appalling conditions within the psychiatric wings of the prisons: improving hygiene; ensuring inmates are on treatment; and working with the State Chief Judge on amnesties for stable inmates, who are then re-settled in their communities.

Amaudo is committed to shared management and organization through regular community, house and worker meetings. These meetings deal with every aspect of day-to-day planning and development at the frontiers. If we have a difficult issue that is worrying us, members of the community who were formerly destitute discuss it in their own house meetings first. The worker group will have a look at it without any of the mentally destitute people present. Then the issue is considered by the community meeting which is made up of sixteen elected residents, two from each house, and the workers. There are more of the first group than the second.

Continuously, in all my working relationships, I am using the skills I learnt from the work paper sessions about listening and facilitating and how you use your experience to help others rather than telling stories about your experience. I can remember in the group the frustration whenever anybody began to talk about, "Oh, I had that experience three years ago, this is what I did with it." We actually didn't need to hear it! At the beginning I think I picked up those things unconsciously. Later on, I was consciously learning from the facilitators. Exactly the same methods and skills used on those furlough courses with mission partners who had had training and education were effective in getting people in Amaudo and Uzuakoli to think things through for themselves. You don't need a university education to be empowered and that is what the *avec* approach does for all kinds of people.

One of the issues was about people doing their share of the work involved in living together in community. Work has to be done. We have to grow our own food, do the washing, cut the grass and many other things. Some of our residents are reluctant to do these things and refuse. We had to face the question, "What do you do if somebody refuses?" The community brought forth various options such as giving people hard labour, nasty jobs, ask the people to leave. Eventually what was decided unanimously by the community meeting was that people should miss meals. Their food means everything to them. They had found it really difficult to get food when they were on the streets. Fifteen years of that makes food very important. And many had big appetites because they were mentally ill and on medication. That community solution has worked.

Our first point of contact with people in Amaudo is on the streets where they have been roaming destitute sometimes for upwards of fifteen years. They are both men and women, very varied in age and background. Most have had only two or three years of primary school education if any but a small number have had secondary school education. A fairly significant number of these had their first spell of mental illness during their time of exams at the end of class five when they would be between nineteen and twenty-two. They are people who in the main come from rural families. Almost everybody has been re-introduced to their families, who in the main are making their living through growing their own food and doing petty trading, and resettled.

When we pick them up from the streets they are generally naked and malnourished; they have very long matted hair and are very dirty, not having bathed sometimes for years. Very many of them have a lot of physical problems. Some have open sores and ulcers all over their bodies. Many are maimed or disfigured. We have somebody at the moment whose family cut all his fingers off both hands because they thought he was going to be violent. Some have suffered abuse because people fear them so much. If, for instance, someone sees one of these people coming close to them they will do whatever they can do to get them away from them and that sometimes means throwing battery acid at them. We have a man with us who has severe burns from head to foot down one side of his body. Many of the women have been sexually abused. A lot of men are very anxious to get rich quickly. Some traditional healers advise them that a way to do so is to have sexual relations with mentally ill women. So they force themselves upon such women, they rape them. (We are sure

about this because we have been approached by men asking us to supply them with mentally ill women. We rarely have sexual problems in Amaudo even though men and women live in close proximity to each other.) As a result, a number of women we pick up from the streets are pregnant or have children or are suffering from gynaecological problems. Understandably these women have very ambivalent feelings about men. Some are really angry and one wonders whether they will ever be able to have a satisfying relationship again. We have a trained midwife in Amaudo so we can provide antenatal care and some children are born in the compound.

Chibuzo's story will illustrate how we go about things in Amaudo. Chibuzo (that is not her real name) is almost forty. She had been on the streets for fifteen years. (She had not been sexually abused.) Everybody knew her well. She was aggressive and people feared her. She used to shout a lot. She wandered around the market and had a place near to it where she cooked, did everything for herself and slept.

Over a period of time we befriended her and got to know her. By the time we had established a fairly good relationship with her a vacancy occurred. She came with us quite freely. (Most people do come freely. They will say, "I'm hungry and I've got something wrong with me. Can you do something?" We assure them we can help and they come.) Like everybody else, she was assigned to a house of eight people who live together with a key worker responsible for befriending and being close to them during the time they remain at Amaudo. (Residential workers are Africans from different areas. They have not been mentally ill. They are people with a Christian commitment, though little formal training, who have been challenged by what we are doing and have decided to come and join us.)

Chibuzo, like all new residents, was bathed, her head was shaved because of scabies and lice and she was given clothes. For the first three weeks she was not treated with any drugs so that we could observe her as she was. When we understood a little more about her illness the worker group together prescribed psychotropic drugs. Each week we meet to assess a quarter of the residents. All the residential staff are there. We pool all our observations. So, if the driver is out with a resident he will say how the resident was when s/he went out with him in the car.

For the first year we had a doctor at Amaudo. He taught us everything he possibly could about psychiatric drugs and about psychiatric illnesses. We have an ongoing training programme about psychiatric illness and treatment. Speakers come in regularly. We have a consultant psychiatrist who is available to us whenever we have any difficulties or need more expert advice. But the interesting thing is that because we are living so intimately with these people we have actually built up a huge body of expertise about the drugs, about the way these illnesses manifest themselves and about how we can treat them. Psychiatrists see somebody for about twenty minutes once a month and are supposed to be able to assess what is going on with them. We actually live with our residents really closely twenty-four hours a day. The slightest changes in their behaviour are picked up immediately. That enables us to be quite effective in terms of our treatment.

Chibuzo started to take her place in the community. She ate with everyone else. She attended prayers (each day begins and ends with them), services and Bible studies.

She shared in the work we have to do as a community. So Chibuzo was beginning to do again all the things that African village people do. She also entered one of our ten different workshops which train people in vocational skills such as tailoring, shoe-making, carpentry, hairdressing, typing, weaving, cane work and trading. This means they can set up on their own in a small way when they leave Amaudo. Chibuzo chose "jewellery making". It is very basic work threading beads onto pieces of string and making earrings and necklaces. That is very suitable for people first coming in off the streets. She worked with five or six other residents at a round table with one teacher. That enabled her to begin to sit down with other people and do something else other than shouting at people. She had become so frightened and insecure on the streets that she was not able to relate to anybody else except by shouting. So the workshop really helped her to realise that not everybody was against her and to begin to concentrate on something again. For the first couple of months she wasn't able to produce much. She also had a lot of physical problems including a very severe ulcer on her leg. We concentrated on getting her physically fit.

One of the most important and time consuming things is the re-acquisition of daily living skills. It's a real struggle to get people back into the habit of bathing morning and evening and washing their clothes. That is one of the house parent's most important jobs. Time is set aside every morning where these are the only things that happen. Chibuzo gave us a really tough time. She just wouldn't bath every day. On several occasions during the first few weeks the houseparent had to call on other residents and house parents to assist her in persuading Chibuzo to begin to take care of herself. But then it happened! The drugs began to relieve her most distressing symptoms, hearing voices all the time. They were shouting at her, telling her what to do and persecuting her. She was very frightened of them. After about three months treatment she gave over hearing the voices and began to take care of herself and her appearance, bathing and washing her clothes without any encouragement from others.

From the beginning, detailed assessments were made of what Chibuzo was able to do, where she had problems, what care she needed, what progress she was making and how we thought we could help her. Alongside all this, I had one to one sessions with her about her life - where she'd come from, where she felt she was going and what her illness was all about. The chaplain had pastoral counselling sessions with her as well. At the beginning Chibuzo would not give us any information whatsoever. She gave us a false name. Each time we asked her where she came from it was always a different village. It took six months for her to feel sufficiently secure with us and to trust us not to "send" her back home without any consultation, for her to be able to say, "Okay this is where I came from".

Her village was a couple of hundred kilometres away in another state. So she had come a long way from home. We arranged a home visit with her to trace her family. It was a very emotional day. The people in her village knew she'd been on the streets but hadn't heard about her for eight years since she moved out of their state. They thought she was dead. People were just jumping up and screaming, "A ghost come alive!" They just could not believe what they saw. Everybody came out from the village, several hundred people, to see Chibuzo's return. It was really heartwarming. She was quite different from when last they saw her - she was clean, neatly dressed and she'd put on

weight. But most importantly she recognized people and was able to ask how it was with them. She had obviously missed out on many family developments because she had been out of the family for fifteen years. They were absolutely thrilled. It was a very important day for her because the reception she got was so warm.

From the senior brother in the village we got a concise history of what had happened. Chibuzo's illness had started about twenty-five years ago when she was thirteen or fourteen. (The age at which schizophrenia is often manifested.) They sold pieces of land in the village to take her to traditional and faith healers and to pay for her to stay in prayer houses. There had been no improvement. Not knowing what to do they had locked her in a small hut at the back of the compound, chained her and gave food to her. (There is a strong belief in traditional thinking that mental illness is actually about demon possession. Traditional healers recommend that you beat the demons out of them or confine people and exorcise them. It's a nasty process.) The family didn't know what else to do. They were not deliberately maltreating her. Chibuzo had very clear memories of the couple of years she had spent chained up and beaten. Finally she'd broken loose and run away. She had still got the chains on her feet when she left. They were off her when we found her but there was lots of scar tissue around her ankles.

Having got another side of Chibuzo's history we could explore with her what had happened to her and why. We helped her to see the problems that her family had experienced and that they didn't deliberately maltreat her. Getting her to remember and work at her experiences helped her recovery.

Now we were able to plan a programme of re-settlement. The family was encouraged to come to Amaudo. The senior brother came with some of his children and a nephew. They spent a day with us and through talks with other residents and workers they began to understand what mental illness is all about and what we are doing at Amaudo.

When Chibuzo was ready, she made home visits. She would go for a week at a time. When we picked her up we had fairly lengthy conversations with the family about the week and any problems that they had experienced. These conversations helped them to understand Chibuzo's illness, what we were trying to do with her and what they could and could not expect of her.

Chibuzo is a chronic psychotic. She's been sick for twenty-five years. She is not going to be as well and as normal as her brothers and sisters in the village. She's always going to need maintenance drugs to make sure that she doesn't relapse. And the drugs will always slow her up a little. When you sit with her she doesn't initiate much conversation on her own. She remains fairly isolated but that is partly a result of years on the street and it is also partly just the residue of the mental illness. She doesn't find it easy to befriend people, to trust people initially and to sit down and just chat with people. Those are the kind of things the village needs to understand. Chibuzo needs help to order her life. Amaudo life is fairly structured and she works very well within that setting. The home visits showed that left to her own devices she would stay on the bed for the day. But if people said, "We're going to farm now, you need to come with us", she would go. With that kind of encouragement she's fine, she'll do a little

work with them. Before she left Amaudo, she had moved from jewellery to making baskets. When she was discharged she was given all that she needed to make baskets at home. She can turn out a fine basket now and has no difficulty in selling them.

Chibuzo went home eight months ago. Our workers visit her monthly. They give her injections. They talk with the family about how things are going and any problems that have arisen.

Amaudo opened in 1989. During these first five years we have had 142 people who have passed through Amaudo of which 133 are back in their villages. Two people have gone back on the streets. Five people did not have families alive to care for them. Two people have died.

We have another community for those from the streets who have a mental handicap. A number of them do not have speech and therefore are not able to tell us where they come from. They need long-term care in a much smaller environment. So we have a community where they can live permanently with houseparents. Those from Amaudo who cannot go home also live there in a kind of community village. They cook and work for themselves. They have a co-operative farm and they are economically self-sufficient.

There is an open door policy in Amaudo. If somebody breaks down or there is a problem at home, which happens occasionally, then they can come back. Also, what we have found is that when people have been home for about two years or so it is quite good for them to come back for a visit for a month. But they do not come back permanently. We've never done that.

In relation to my work in Nigeria over the past fourteen and a half years, Avec courses have been of tremendous value. They have been the single most helpful thing in the area of professional development that has happened to me. The help I've got is not with the details such as treatment and diet. Those things we can manage to sort out ourselves. It has been help with the overall processes through which we work. It is about basics - how we do things and why. The courses and the consultancy sessions have enabled me to step back and to take a different look at my work, my situation, the critical issues, the problems we're facing. It is the particular way in which that is done through the *avec* approach that has been useful to me. It has helped me to develop Uzuakoli and Amaudo. And I have taken back to my places of work in Nigeria the very processes and skills we used to look at our work situations. What I got out of those furlough courses were things that are real to my situation because they are true to life.

There was something about the structure of the courses and the care and sensitivity of the facilitators which enabled us to have that real sense of trust in each other very early on. We all felt very cared about and supported. Being residential and away from everybody was really important. Eating and praying together formed us into a community and created an atmosphere in which we were able to share things that were causing concerns, things that a number of people hadn't had an opportunity to share with anyone else except perhaps their spouse.

I remember being really grateful for the opportunity of being with a group of people working overseas in different contexts. As the course went on I became terribly

excited by the whole experience and aware of the incredible privilege of actually working with other people on their work situations. That was important. There was an openness but I did not feel in any way threatened because we always remained in control of our own situations. Ideas and suggestions were presented as options. You were asked, "How do you feel about this idea?" "Will it fit?" "No". "What would fit?" And that went on until you could say, "This feels right." Checking things out in that way was freeing and very important.

It was totally irrelevant whether the other people in your work paper group had been to Africa because the process does not depend upon others having first hand experience in the same situation. The approach enables us to enter into each other's experience and situation and to help each other to look at issues that are of concern to us and to find ways through them. It is very strange how you come up with something in an hour or two when you've been bashing away at it for weeks on your own without seeing the way forward.

Furlough courses and consultancy sessions, as I have found them, do not give you answers to your problems: they help you to take a new look at "your" problems; they help you to see how you can tackle them with the people with whom you are living and working. I haven't got "the" answers to any of the problems that I've examined with you during this past few weeks but I know just what I am going to do about them when I get back to Amaudo and how to get people there working at them. Whatever the problem, working at it together contributes to the development of all of us and the rehabilitation of mentally ill people.

If there is anything that we are about as missionaries, it must be about enabling people to make decisions for themselves, empowering people, building them up to be able to look at issues and to work out what their needs are and how they can meet them themselves. And that is what Avec was all about. We used empowering processes on the course. That was exciting and tremendously important. We weren't just talking about them, we used them and went away equipped and eager to use them.

For instance I came to you a few weeks ago with several problems. One was about the five people living in the community village which is a permanent home for mentally handicapped people. These five people from Amaudo who had been rejected by their families have settled in this village as a separate entity, living independently with support. It is working well but I worry about the quality of life of those five people. Also, I felt that the arrangement posed threats to both communities. For those in Amaudo for whom returning home to their families is a much sought after ideal but who live with the possibility and fear of rejection, having to settle in the community village is seen as the end of the road. Such negativity undermines their rehabilitative process. On the other hand those rejected need a viable alternative, a life with quality better than that on the streets.

I had been going over and over this problem in my head. I had talked to four or five people since I came home, including somebody who had been working with me in Nigeria and everyone of them had done just what I had been doing, trying to decide what was the right model for the five people. Twenty minutes with you and the thing was turned on its head. I found myself saying, "Who am I to decide what is the right rehabilitative community model for these people when we are actually in the business

of empowering people?" We are a community committed to people's participation in the ongoing progress and development of Amaudo and we have regular community meetings and a liaison committee with the villages around us. All these people need to have this on their agendas. Collectively they could find solutions. When we have issues that are troublesome and worrisome, we need to go to all those involved and with them work through to a solution. To work alongside people at Amaudo in that way can be difficult. So my problem is how I can best do that. Basically what we have to do, I began to see, is to get the rehabilitative process working as well for those who cannot go back to their village as it does for those who can. We have to help them to find the best place for them to live. I now know the next steps to take.

Another problem was about the new chaplain soon to be appointed to Amaudo. My thinking was muddled and biased because of the difficulties we had experienced with the present chaplain. He has not been able to work through his own needs to pastor our community effectively. The next chaplain will also be inexperienced because at present only young ministers without families can fit into community living. I had the idea that a job description could solve the problem. I asked you to help me to write one. What happened was that we started to look at the chaplain and his job: the theological expertise he brings; what he needs to learn and how he can do so; the pastoral and theological functions he could perform; the support and supervision he needs. We were back to basics. We considered how he could best be inducted so that he could see his work as that of a pastor, minister and theologian. My orientation to the chaplaincy changed. I became quite excited about the possibilities. I was no longer thinking of writing everything down in a job description to avoid the problems we had with the former chaplain and to get the kind of chaplaincy that we needed and wanted. Now I was thinking of the role of the chaplain as something that he can own and that we can own. People in that community need to be able to say, "This is what we would like the chaplain to be for us." And he really needs to hear that. And there's a much wider aspect, with clear thinking we could enable the chaplain, possibly with the help of his college, to do a theological critique of chaplaincy to the mentally ill and of community living as in Amaudo and its wider implications. That would bring together his professional expertise with that of the worker group in Amaudo.

An experience on one of the first furlough courses has remained with me over the years. One of the ordained missionaries, John (that is not his real name) felt that it was time to leave what he had been doing and to move into something else. He was struggling to decide which of four very interesting options he ought to go for. Which was the will of God for him? We went into the issues in great depth. The quality of the sharing was moving and humbling. I believe we helped him most by exploring the criteria by which he decided God's will for him 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. John's tendency was to say, "That is me being selfish, wanting to do what I want to do. I really need to find out what God wants me to do rather than what I want to do." The work paper group got on to this because, although John was trying to treat all the options equally, we saw that the one nearest to his heart he had put right at the bottom of his 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 his 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, God given, 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, "This is how it was for me." That would not have helped. Working with John on 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.

Recently, for instance, I met a young man in Taizé who was considering very seriously what he should do with his life. He felt he had to make far-reaching changes in his life and in his life-style. He wanted to leave the work he was doing. He had a number of options. He was asking people, "How do I know what God's will is for me? Which is the option God wants me to do?" Immediately I went back to John's situation. I did not tell the story. I suggested to this man in Taizé that he might find an answer by going deep inside himself and exploring his own personal feelings about each option and to be open to the possibility that the one which really excited him might be what God's will was for him.

For most of the time I am the only British person permanently in Amaudo. All those around me are Nigerian. We live in a traditionally highly hierarchical society. Those who are able to use power and authority use them and very often abuse them. In Amaudo we have built up a community with quite different values from the society in which we live by using a concept of working which is really different because it is basically non-directive whereas everyone else is very directive. Interestingly, Amaudo is quite successful in helping mentally ill people to rehabilitate in villages with authoritarian structures.

I am against authoritarian ways of working but while I am working in a society that is authoritarian I find myself veering away a little from the important need to empower people. I take on more than I need to. What happened to me over the past two years was that I started to approach these problems about the community village and the chaplain in a directive way typical of church and society in Nigeria. When we started to work at the problems I saw immediately that I needed to work on them with people in Amaudo rather than to try to find and impose a solution. I was jerked back to the non-directive approach and to my commitment to working *with* rather than *for* people. That was essential.

Furlough courses have constantly brought me back to the *avec* way of doing things which I consider to be the right way. There is no other forum, no other opportunity in my working life, nobody else to remind me of that. Being brought back to basics in that way also increased my awareness that whilst people are in Amaudo they are quite strong people. They have opportunities to look at themselves and their work and to work through issues. They have some power and authority. When they go into organ-

isations and churches they are not going to be given quite such a free rein. So it is going to be different and difficult for them at times. We have to help them to prepare for that because, like us, they have to live in the prevailing culture.

It has been tremendously helpful and invaluable for me to have a one to one consultancy session with you on all the issues concerning me. But I have missed the furlough course very deeply. The richness of Avec is in working with each other on each other's situations. It is a huge privilege to work not only on your own situation but on those of others. In a one to one you are the skilled and I am the one that is grappling and learning but in work paper groups we had the opportunity to begin to learn and use consultancy skills to help other people. I missed being in a reflective group. Also I think that it is very helpful to have a whole batch of time working on things rather than periodic sessions. These provisions are important. I stake my life on that. I feel devastated by the thought that they may not be there for us any longer.

In 1986 I had another experience of Avec at work when you led a consultation in Nigeria between representatives of the Methodist Church Nigeria and the Methodist Church Overseas Division. I was one of the representatives of the Nigerian Church.¹ I was amazed what came out of that. Prior to that meeting both the Methodist Church Overseas Division and the Methodist Church Nigeria were really suspicious about, and angry with the other party and what they were doing. This was connected with the action taken in Nigeria after the Church had become autonomous to indigenise itself. Episcopal structures were introduced against great resistance. Instead of a "President" the Church had a "Patriarch". Much emphasis was placed upon episcopal attire. The Patriarch had symbolic keys of office. All this and the titles that went with it were offensive to a large number of Methodists in Nigeria and Britain. A significant part of the Methodist Church Nigeria seceded. In fact there were two Methodist Churches, the "Patriarchal" and the "Presidential", which retained the same structures as the British Methodist Church. It was, however, with the Methodist Church Nigeria, the episcopal section, that the British Methodist Church remained in official contact. These developments caused deep and acrimonious faction in Nigeria and Britain.

I was stuck in the middle of it all and I had a really painful time of it. When I came home on furlough, I found the Methodist Church Overseas Division undervaluing the Methodist Church Nigeria. They disliked what was happening, it was not Methodism as they had known it. That was really painful for me. The Methodist Church Nigeria was feeling quite bolshie. They felt they had made bold and effective steps towards indigenising the Church and that they were having their knuckles rapped by mother Church. Some not very tasteful letters were exchanged. The consultation was just so freeing. It was an opportunity for everybody to come together. For the first time people started listening to each other. The British representatives actually listened to what the indigenisation of the Church had all been about, what it meant to the Nigerians and why they felt it was

¹ This consultation was one of three: Sierra Leone 1984, Ghana 1985 and Nigeria 1986. The aim was to move the relationships to a deeper level where dependency and inter-dependency gave way to interdependence and mutualality. Aspects of the Sierra Leone consultation are described in Chapter Four:2. An account was published in the *Epworth Review*, Vol 15:2, May 1988: *Relationships in Mission*, by Leslie Griffiths.

important. Then the Nigerians listened to the kind of hurt that had been around in the Methodist Church Overseas Division and the bitterness that had come out of what had been written and done. Having heard each other out, and recognising we had the same goals, we began there and then to work at the implications of the situation. We were reconciled.

Learning the method through that consultation was of itself tremendously useful. It had a wide use for Methodist Church Nigeria. They had never worked through such a difficult issue in that way. Traditional African society goes some way towards that through the palaver system where everyone comes together and speaks out until there is some kind of consensus. However within a non-traditional structure such as Church and Government the people who do have the power and authority will more often take the decisions. But it was a much more democratic and exciting process that was going on in that consultation. It involved everyone and it worked.

At an early stage we reached an agreement that we were there to work at our relationships in mission. Everybody took that on board and so they were ready to listen. Listening was terribly important. Avec did what Avec has a knack of doing, it created a safe environment where people actually felt able to work through the issues. Quickly they put aside their bitternesses, anger and annoyance. The facilitators helped tremendously. They got us to look at each situation in turn, to list what we needed to consider and to work at key issues together in small mixed groups. Facilitators and process enabled us to build up trust so quickly.

Whenever we talk of church history in Nigeria that consultation is always talked of as the occasion which turned round the relationships 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. I was not involved but I heard all about what happened. 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.

Not only do these methods work but they tie up very closely with my beliefs about and my commitment to helping people to realise their potential through enabling and empowering them. I am particularly concerned to promote power sharing with people who are deprived and those who are destitute.

I have fallen in love with Nigeria and the incredible vitality of life there. Life is never on an even keel in Nigeria, everything is either wonderful or atrocious. Life is constantly full of joys and sorrows and tears and laughter. And I love the warmth, openness and aggressiveness of the Nigerian people. Adrenalin constantly flows. What I want to do there is simply to go on serving amongst the poorest of the poor, the severely stigmatised groups of people in that society and particularly those who have leprosy and those who are mentally ill. That is where I have always felt I wanted to work. What I've learnt from Amaudo is that the only way that I can live is in community, there is just so much in community living that enables us to realise our potential and the quality of life we are meant to enjoy as Christians.

An Amaudo training programme has just started. In the first session we looked at why we do what we do in the way we do it. It was really exciting to do that with our young workers and especially to look closely at the Bible. The favourite passage is the one where Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... he has sent me to announce good news to the poor..." (Luke 4:18-19). That is something people hold on to. It links the Old and the New Testaments. It is also about holistic care because it is setting people free and that brings in the holistic nature of Amaudo. It is not just about providing physical care, it is about the whole person in community and the Kingdom. When people come to Amaudo they understand that intuitively. But it is only when we have spent time together looking at the biblical basis of what we do and why we do it in the way that we do that the significance become clear to all of us.

God has been in Africa a lot longer than I have. I am trying to discover him and his ways there, as much as my fellow Nigerians are, through this work and helping others to do the same.

Observations and Impressions

Beyond any doubt Ros Colwill shows that Furlough courses are profoundly important temporary reflective communities and consultancy sessions are invaluable reflective partnerships. They are invariably creative events. They are additional investments which should be built into the capital investment in any labour force for many reasons. They add to its value enormously. They help to save people in difficulties with their work. They develop people, their professional abilities, their creativity and their satisfaction in their work.

Providing these facilities is a costly business because they are labour intensive. By any criteria, failure to provide them is folly. I wish to see them multiplied so that they are available to all those who work with people for human and spiritual development. They need them when they are on furlough, sabbatical leave and when they are at work in Nigeria, the U.K. or anywhere else. Courses such as those which Avec provided are required. But groups of workers need to foster their abilities to make the necessary arrangements to meet each other's needs for such reflective communities and partnerships in situ. Needs will simply not be met without such diversification of provision. Multiplying the provision in this way increases the abilities of workers to meet their own needs. This makes them more self-sufficient and less dependent upon scarce resources.

As Ros indicates, co-consultancy courses have advantages over consultancy partnerships. One advantage is that it promotes cooperation rather than competition between practitioners, an essential attribute in work which seeks to promote widely based human and spiritual interdependence in the economy of holistic development and the pursuit of salvation and holiness. A particular aspect of this advantage is that it builds practitioners and especially those working in isolation from each other into a wider fellowship, community, communion of practitioners. Studying other people's work with them was for Ros a privileged and valuable part of the courses. Because it allows people to contribute to each other's work it generates genuine mutual interest, care and support. Such an ethos is good for any organization and essential for the Church.

Amaudo is an incredible development. This is not the place to discuss the model and processes but I cannot resist a couple of observations. I was fascinated by the way in which they used the workers observations of the residents to understand them and their illnesses and to decide on their treatment. Sharing and comparing the different perspectives gave a rounded picture no one person could have obtained. It was a tool of community therapy. I have used similar methods, "participant observation", which I learnt from anthropology and community studies, in church and community and development work and research. The other observation is the fascinating light that Ros's story sheds on a development worker's experiences of the intersections between authoritarian and non-authoritarian groups, communities, organizations and structures. I found myself wanting to model it and the way in which people who were mentally ill had moved between family and home village, the streets, Amaudo, family and home village or an alternative community. They live in and move between an amazingly wide variety of social, religious and authoritarian structures. Their survival is a profound testimony to the adaptability and durability of human beings.

In a telling phrase Ros speaks of consultations turning problems on their heads. John V. Taylor has said, "There is nothing in this earth more powerful or revolutionary than a newly recognized idea, or a situation seen in a new way."²

What is enormously impressive is the way in which rehabilitative caring of mentally ill people has led to better provision for such people in prison and society and to discussions about causes and treatment with a wide range of people including traditional healers. Recently Ros has been appointed adviser to their association.

My overwhelming feelings are of unbounded admiration for Ros and what she is doing and deep gratitude for the privilege of making a small contribution to work of enormous importance that I personally could not undertake.

² *A Matter of Life and Death*, (SCM, 1986) p.4.

Chapter Six

REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

Visiting old friends in new places doing different jobs is endlessly fascinating. Familiar characteristics often take on a new light and new ones appear and take one by surprise. Gathering and editing these stories has been that kind of experience for me in relation to my old friends the non-directive and *avec* approaches. I have seen them "housed", in the lives and vocations of many different kinds of people and used, vigorously and creatively, in all kinds of contexts. The stories have spoken to me with many voices, excited me with new insights, evoked all kinds of comments and given me an extending agenda of things to pursue. Much of the richness of this expanding universe of experience of these approaches would have been missed had I approached the interviews to get illustrations of characteristics of the *avec* approach that I wished to highlight.

When I came to this chapter I had a strong desire to classify and list the points made. That is of my nature! I resisted because that might deflect readers from the stories to the constructs I put upon them. What is important is what readers make of all this and what they do about it. Nevertheless, as I reflected on the stories and browsed through the papers I needed something to help me to get my mind around the varied aspects of the stories. Charts answered my need. They map out the points without synthesising them; they show the emerging pattern without imposing some grand design upon it; they bring to mind what has been said for further reflection and comment. I present them below as an *aide-memoire*. Clearly, it is important for you to do your own reflection and to begin to articulate your responses. Perhaps this is the point at which to do this.

CHARTED SUMMARIES OF THE STORIES, THE CHANGES THAT OCCURRED, THE ISSUES RAISED AND THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED.

Note. All contributors valued the approach because it enabled them to pursue their vocation and tallied with their Christian beliefs.

These points have been assumed in this summary.

The charts are arranged in six columns with the following headings:

1. Chapter/Person
2. The Story
3. Major consequences and effects of using Avec services and the Avec approach
4. Principal points made and issues raised/described/discussed
5. What they wish to say to the church
6. Subjects considered in Editor's 'Observations and Impressions'

At the side of each page is the Chapter heading.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>One. The Minister as Technocrat by Leslie Griffiths who is a Methodist Minister who was President of the Methodist Conference 1994-5.</p> <p>Leslie is in his early 50's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 19 years.</p> <p>See pp 15-28</p>	<p>Leslie Griffiths tells how the <i>avec</i> approach and a ten-day course transformed his way of working with ordinary Haitian people and the remarkable developments that occurred when they exercised "real power and real responsibilities." Also, he indicates the relevance of the approach to the overall work of the Methodist Church, its restructuring and to divisive theological and social issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipped him to redeem his Haitian ministry. • The <i>avec</i> approach has gone into his blood stream and saved him from the worst excesses of what could have been instinctive to him because of the thrusting and spontaneous nature of his personality. • Radically affected the way in which he sees his ministry. • Enhanced his evangelical role. • The <i>avec</i> approach has been incorporated into some organizational aspects of the Church. • He became an <i>Avec</i> Associate in 1984.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus the great "Includer", gives theological credence to the <i>avec</i> approach. • The <i>avec</i> approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is elaborated common sense; • can be used with and by people differing in cultures and academic ability; • facilitates collaborative ministry; • helps to heal factions; • engenders objectivity and controlled emotional involvement; • helps people to think critically and creatively wherever they are located; • is not an excuse to be dilatory or refractory; • does not preclude directive action. • Periodic work consultancy sessions facilitate "self-appraisal". • Pseudo attempts at collaboration can imprison and debilitate. • Inter alia, ministers need to be technocrats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to incorporate <i>avec</i> ways of working in the Church at the highest level as well as at the grass roots. • "What ... I've learned from <i>Avec</i> is precisely what the Church needs ... in terms of some of its unhealed wounds." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for servant ministry as well as high profile leadership. • The <i>avec</i> approach as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common sense; • a tool of servant ministry. • Practising this approach is hard work and involves much backroom and technical work. • The dangers inherent in doctrinaire approaches to participation and consultation.

TWO: COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Two. A Way of Life by Charles New who is a Methodist Minister. When interviewed he was the Superintendent of the Birkenhead Circuit. Now he is Superintendent of the Bramhall Circuit, Cheshire.</p> <p>Charles is in his early 50's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 25 years.</p> <p>See pp 29-42</p>	<p>Charles New describes how he has used the <i>avec</i> approach to good effect in working for development with people in the church and in the community in very different socio-religious contexts varying from areas of acute urban deprivation to suburban ones. He also describes how the approach has enabled him to help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people with little formal education to think theologically about church work; • people to face and resolve acute conflict; • a group of Methodist churches to work out policies and mission statements for each church and for all the churches together. <p>He describes how this approach and the associated beliefs and theories have become a way of life for him which is central to his interaction with people and events.</p> <p>Charles reflects on the way in which in the early part of his ministry he was politically active through the Alliance of Radical Methodists. Most of his subsequent ministry has been spent in local church and community based ministry and working at religious and societal issues that impact upon it. This, he says, mirrors the work of <i>Avec</i> which addresses issues through the work of others: it is not an issue based organization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practising the <i>avec</i> approach habitually made him into a better and more effective reflective minister and development worker. • He got Christians and non-Christians from very different social and religious backgrounds, churches and groups of churches working together for the common good and on local church and community development projects. • For over twenty years he worked part-time with <i>Avec</i> which benefitted from his local work. His local work also benefitted from his national involvement. Charles found the interaction stimulating, challenging, fulfilling and exhausting. • Charles researched his local development work for an M Phil. degree.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with strong personalities and a propensity to dominate need the non-directive approach and can use it. • The <i>avec</i> approach is compatible and necessary to radical, political and prophetic action. It is important to avoid assuming one person can engage in all these activities. • The <i>avec</i> approach is a costly but rewarding way of life even though it cannot be practised perfectly. • Co-consultancy relationships on work and vocation over extended periods are invaluable and much needed. • Importance of being "comfortable" in working relationships. • Christian convictions and beliefs upon which the <i>avec</i> approach based. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church workers need independent training and consultancy services of the kind provided by <i>Avec</i>. It would make them more creative and so it is good stewardship. • The Church needs the slowly emerging work culture within which it will be natural to appraise and use work and vocational consultancy services. • <i>Avec</i> type services are complementary to appraisal schemes and necessary to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significance of the way in which Charles operates through a dialectic between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his way of life nucleus; • people and events; • his theoretical and theological bases. • The need to be able to work from examples to theory and from theory to practice. • Creative use of self-assertive energies through the non-directive approach.

TWO: COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Three. A Non-Directive Approach to Evangelical Ministry by Howard Mellor who is a Methodist Minister. Howard was the Director of Evangelism for the Methodist Church when interviewed and is now the Principal of Cliff College. He is in his mid 40's and has been using the approach for 18 years.</p> <p>See pp 42-57</p>	<p>Howard Mellor describes and reflects on the way in which his use of the non-directive approach made highly significant contributions to two churches of their own volition forming one church. For many years they had resisted vigorous attempts by previous ministers to persuade one church to close and join the other. He describes the usefulness of a local work paper group formed by several local practitioners which had a life of many years. He also describes how, by using the approach as Director of Evangelism, he got churches to look to Cliff College for help with <i>their</i> mission rather than asking Cliff to conduct a mission <i>for</i> them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Howard's introduction to the avec approach was a conversion experience which profoundly affected the way in which he goes about his work and his evangelical ministry. Inter alia, the practice of the avec approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enabled Howard to do his work more effectively; united two churches long divided; led a wide range of other people to practise it including Cliff College evangelists; caused churches to be responsible for <i>their</i> mission rather than looking to Cliff College to do it for them; is influencing the way in which the evangelical learning community at Cliff College is being developed and the teaching methods used. Widespread excitement about the approach and its potential. Researching the relevance of the non-directive approach to evangelism for an MA thesis. Becoming a part-time member of staff of Avec for a year to prepare for new post of Director of Evangelism. Became an Avec Associate in 1980. A module on the non-directive approach to ministry in the new MA in Evangelism.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The non-directive approach is highly relevant to evangelical ministry and preaching aimed at promoting inner dialogue. It is consistent with scripture. It is frustratingly slow but failure and frustration from other approaches is greater. The non-directive approach is a way of refining and informing evangelical ministry. Work papers and private preparation are invaluable. The value of long-term vocational help from the same person which covers both work and vocational issues. Work and vocational consultancy help for ministers (and for ministers and their spouses) is invaluable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All those engaged in Christian ministry should have opportunities at an early stage to get hold of the ideas and methods associated with the avec approach and consultancy processes. Work and vocational help is needed and should be more generally available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evangelical ministry and social involvement can go together. The relationship between evangelical ministry and the non-directive approach is a serious one; it is not a theological joke.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Four. Direct and Non-Directive Action by Fred Graham who is a priest in the Church of Ireland. Fred was the parish priest of a rural parish when interviewed. He is in his late 50's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 17 years.</p> <p>See pp 57-68</p>	<p>Fred Graham tells how he came to adopt the <i>avec</i> approach because he thought it more relevant to parish ministry than the "T-group" training to which previously he had been committed. He describes and reflects upon the action he took in a staunchly Protestant church and community during the height of the Troubles to get better relationships between people of different denominations. He describes the conflict and intimidation he had to endure and the changes that occurred. Also, he tells how he has used the <i>avec</i> training and consultancy model and describes the plans afoot for an Irish agency similar to <i>Avec</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fred's life changed radically and became more abundant as a direct consequence of adopting the <i>avec</i> approach. It has inter alia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changed the way he works with people and churches; • developed his ability to stand back and analyse; • built up his confidence in his ability to analyse and make appropriate responses; • led him to use his energy to empower others; • affected changes in local church work culture by creating structures by which lay people become partners in ministry and mission. • The diploma course led him to research his ways of working and to reflect on his ministry more deeply than ever before. • He became an <i>Avec</i> Associate in 1980. • The inauguration of an <i>Avec</i> type agency in Ireland. • Fred is being widely used as a facilitator and consultant in Ireland and particularly in his Diocese and by his bishop.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A direct (not directive) mode of intervention evolved which facilitated non-directive developmental action in a sectarian church and community during the Troubles. • Working for ecumenical co-operation in a sectarian church and society. • Changing the work culture of churches so that people participate and think for themselves. • Gaining insights into the nature of the community in which you are working. • Getting clergy to think. • Development is a messy, disturbing, upsetting and confusing business. 	<p>The Church in Ireland needs the <i>avec</i> approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting people with closed minds to re-think again. • Working for development through informal community meeting points and structures and through networks. • Direct action as a means of challenging people and kick-starting discussion about critical issues.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>One. Masks Off by Joanna Brennan who is a Roman Catholic Religious, a member of The Sisters of Charity, and a Parish Sister in Knowle West, a Housing Estate in Bristol. Joanna is in her late 40's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 7 years.</p> <p>See pp 69-76</p>	<p>Joanna Brennan demonstrates that the <i>avec</i> approach can be used effectively to help people with little formal education living in an area of acute deprivation to improve their circumstances and develop themselves. She gives some telling vignettes of how she works including one about getting people on the estate involved in bereavement counselling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affirmed, enriched and developed as a person and improved her self-image through completing the diploma course. • Built up her confidence and ability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to work at things academically with academics and non-academics; • to reflect about work theologically. • Less inclined to do things for people.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way in which the <i>avec</i> approach helps people with little formal education to participate in analytical processes in academic and non-academic settings. But it doesn't always work. • Learning about the <i>avec</i> approach is readily transferable from academic to non-academic community settings. • Developmental effects of working with ordinary people are enormous. • The negative effects of middle class directive people who do not live in the estate taking leadership roles in the local church. • Importance of struggling together to understand things in academic settings ("tutors don't have all the answers") and in the local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for the Church to listen to women and particularly working class women and to raise them up as Jesus did. • Pay attention to people in local churches and communities. Empower them. Don't allow people from outside to run churches and local organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significance of transformative changes in people even when they are not accompanied by comparable environmental changes. • Significance of mutual collaborative learning processes between people with different educational backgrounds and life experiences. • The nature of the approach adopted by people from outside a community critically affects the ability to contribute to the well-being and development of the people within it.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Two. Empowered to Empower by Richard McKay who is a Roman Catholic Parish Priest of Christ The King, Knowle West Housing Estate on the outskirts of Bristol. He is also the Dean of the South Bristol Deanery. Richard is in his early 50's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 7 years. See pp 76-84</p>	<p>Richard McKay, an unusually eclectic practitioner, describes the value of the <i>avec</i> approach in bringing cohesive and purposeful thrust into seven principal domains of collaborative ministry in which he is engaged. He tells how this approach is helping him to work with people widely differing in education and resources. He shows how empowered people can be/feel disempowered when disempowered people are empowered. He identifies that he has applied the approach to specific events but not yet design-wise to his parish work as a whole. He describes his experience of dissonance between himself and others in the Roman Catholic Church.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More developed and therefore more skilled at working with people because he thinks more rigorously than ever before about his work and ministry. • Acquired confidence to risk open participation of people in all kinds of committees and groups. • Changed from a didactic way of teaching to the experiential, participative and collaborative ways of learning which <i>Avec</i> used. • Discovered work consultancy which he values and has used to good effect to help a parish in his deanery during a period of interregnum. • Learnt to do theology from experience. Using this approach to good effect in the parish and in diocesan training events. • Greater sense of connectedness and coherence between different aspects of his work/ministry. • Working more collaboratively for development with parish on short- but not yet long-term goals.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>avec</i> approach is an effective teaching method. • Education and empowerment occur through risking total participation in collaborative learning. • The vocational life-history method is a tool of reflection and development. • The value and difficulties of doing theology by starting from experience rather than God, i.e. through an inductive rather than a deductive approach to theology. • Collaboration with lay people and women is easier than with priests. • The boundaries and barriers between short- and long-term planning which prevent him and his parish from doing the second as well as the first. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>avec</i> approach is in line with Christian theology and the teaching of Vatican II. • The Church has to face the question of power and the way in which it should be distributed and the tricky questions of empowerment and disempowerment. • The <i>avec</i> approach has a key contribution to make to the creative redistribution of power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the "souls" and skills of practitioners. • The interplay in churches and communities between empowerment and disempowerment. • Designing and planning for short- and long-term programmes are respectively related to symptoms and causes. • Freedom, pain and importance of working from a place of dissonance in the Church.

THREE: WORKING WITH PEOPLE IN PARISHES IN AREAS OF DEPRIVATION

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Three. Freedom to Participate by David Herrick. When interviewed, he was the Anglican Parish Priest of St George's set on a working class housing estate on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds, and is now the vicar of Great Barton.</p> <p>David is in his early 40's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 6 years.</p> <p>See pp 84-94</p>	<p>David Herrick shows that the use of the <i>avec</i> approach creates "forums" for creative thinking. Because they are so different from disputational and adversarial forums they are intellectually and spiritually liberating. These forums, oases to practitioners, are reflective groups and communities. He describes the difficulties he is experiencing of developing these forums in his parish and the limited progress he has made. In part this is because of the deference people have for the vicar and problems in finding time for reflection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovered a way of working with people entirely in line with his theology which he believes is the approach needed in parish work. This has strengthened his aspiration to work with the local community. • He has become a better reflective practitioner because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he has found that making records of what happened in groups and meetings helps him to study and refine his practice as a non-directive worker; • he has gained more confidence to think aloud and to work at things publicly; • he has discovered how to be collaborative; • he has come to understand the nature and value of work consultancy and co-consultancy groups ("forums"). • He has identified and is grappling with the difficulties of adopting the <i>avec</i> approach in his parish.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>avec</i> approach helps priests to become incumbents. • The <i>avec</i> approach is consonant with and a tool of priestly ministry. But taking a firm line by, for example, refusing to re-marry divorcees can make it difficult to work with people on other things. • Non-directive work consultancy services are valuable. • Diocesan projects can have undesirable effects upon local ones. • Difficulty of communicating about the <i>avec</i> approach to those who have not experienced it. 	<p>It is important for practitioners to have ready access to reflective co-consultancy groups ("forums").</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The necessity of training priests to be ministers and to be incumbents. • Problems of conversion from one way of working to another. • Local workers need safe houses in which they can think openly, radically and constructively with impunity. • External initiatives and parish development work. • The nature and value of recording meetings.

THREE: WORKING WITH PEOPLE IN PARISHES IN AREAS OF DEPRIVATION

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Four. Leaders Who Block Change by Christine Sales who is a Methodist Minister. When interviewed she was a minister of Brunswick, a joint Methodist/United Reformed Church on a working class housing estate. She is in her 40's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 17 years.</p> <p>Note: the essentials of this story are true but Christine Sales and Brunswick are pseudonyms.</p> <p>See pp 94-102</p>	<p>Christine Sales describes the deep seated changes in her approaches to her work that have been generated through experiencing and adopting the <i>avec</i> approach. She describes the enormous difficulties, the hurt and the pain associated with ministering and promoting development in and through a church held to ransom by leaders who threw temper tantrums to defend themselves, their power and positions and the status quo from all initiatives which met with their disapproval. She shows how change occurred over a period of seven years working through the emotional outbursts and gradually replacing old leaders with new ones. This was done without inducing further tantrums or faction. This changed the old guard sufficiently to allow substantive development by accretion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christine acquired tools to handle her work, to study it in depth and to work non-directively. Habitually and continuously she is now looking for ways in which to stimulate development from within situations – a process which is the antithesis of shaping situations to blue prints of church life and ministry. She draws upon work and vocational consultancy help to great advantage and has acquired the skills to offer such help to others. She helps staff training courses. Brunswick was transformed from a church that prevented development to one in which it occurred. Christine describes these as deep seated changes achieved through the <i>avec</i> approach.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The theology of the approach. The critical importance of regular consultancy help from <i>Avec</i> throughout her ministry. The <i>avec</i> approach is indispensable but it's "a lot of damned hard work at times." The importance of releasing everyone's contributions to their own development and that of others. Working to people and their situations versus working to blueprints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministers and congregations need the <i>avec</i> approach. The <i>avec</i> approach should be much more a part of basic training for ministry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic issues raised by the approach adopted, i.e. that of promoting overall development through the gradual introduction of new leaders when it has not been possible to work with or through the existing reactionary leaders for necessary creative change. Critical factors in facilitating the constructive transference of leadership in line with the minister's beliefs and purposes related to ministering to the whole church and each of its members.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>One. The Catholic Deaf Association by Charles Hollywood who is a Roman Catholic Priest working with deaf people locally, nationally and internationally. Based in Moss Side, Manchester, Charles is in his mid 60's and has been using aspects of the <i>avec</i> approach for 20 years.</p> <p>See pp 103-113</p>	<p>Charles Hollywood shows how <i>Avec</i> enabled him to make radical changes in the work with Roman Catholic deaf people in this country. He says that the 1976 course gave him the courage to break with tradition and received wisdom. First he involved all the staff in re-organizing a residential community and its work with deaf people. Then all the staff of the Association received <i>Avec</i> training. Adopting the <i>avec</i> approach enabled deaf people to become partners in the work and in conferences. He describes just how the changes occurred and the developments that ensued. He discusses the Catholic theology which underpins this approach. He speculates about the reasons why a policy document produced with great difficulty by the Association and <i>Avec</i> was not used.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the first time he was able to conceptualise his whole working situation through an <i>Avec</i> course in 1976. • The Association was transformed through the adoption of the <i>avec</i> approach. New forms of egalitarian participation of officers, staff and members led to deaf and hearing people working <i>with</i> each other throughout the organization and its conferences. This led to all kinds of personal and collective developments. It was seen to be the greatest thing that happened to the Association. Because it became an offence, they changed the name from "The Association for the Catholic Deaf ..." to "The Catholic Deaf Association." • A temporary leadership vacuum and role confusion resulted from the rather sudden and wholesale adoption of the non-directive approach and the ending of the "kitchen cabinet." The "prophetic voice" of the Association was temporarily muted. • Conflicts between groups faced openly and constructively. • People used more sensibly, staff felt more involved, all round growth and deeper satisfaction.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with local authorities on provision for deaf people. • Some temporary adverse effects of the adoption of the non-directive approach: loss of leadership, role confusion and the prophetic voice muted. • Formulating policy documents for an Association when there are irreconcilable differences in theology and strategy. • The theological and ecclesiastical status of communities of deaf people, "deaf communities". • The <i>avec</i> approach serves some but not all the functions and models of the Church. • Importance of revising practices, theories and beliefs so that they are all of a piece. 	<p>The question was not put. However, the story shows the vital importance of the <i>avec</i> approach to organizations committed to the development of people with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and consultancy work with an organization rather than with one or two workers is dramatically more productive. • The leadership vacuum and confusion experienced in the transition from directive to non-directive action. • Importance of changing practice and theory so that they are in harmony with each other and practitioners' beliefs.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Two: The Methodist Church, Sierra Leone by Nelson Charles and S. Dowridge-Williams who are Methodist Ministers. Nelson Charles was the President of the Sierra Leone Conference during the Consultation featured in this section.</p> <p>S. Dowridge-Williams was present at the Consultation and is now President.</p> <p>Nelson Charles has been retired for some years; S. Dowridge-Williams is about to retire.</p> <p>See pp 113-121</p>	<p>Quite independently Nelson Charles and S. Dowridge-Williams describe the beneficial effects of a Consultation between the Methodist Church, Sierra Leone and the Methodist Church in Britain in 1984 in Sierra Leone. They reflect on what made the Consultation effective. That was their first experience of the non-directive method. They describe its value and its potential and the way in which they have used the consultative approach in Sierra Leone. They contrast it favourably with the approaches and methods used by previous generations of missionaries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People from Sierra Leone and Britain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learned much about each other and their churches; • established better working relationships and became more equal partners in mission; • established a better financial partnership within which the Church in Sierra Leone had more say. • The consultative method was used throughout the Church in Sierra Leone to get people to take more responsibility for financing their Church. This helped to overcome the dependency induced by the way in which the Church was funded from London. • A joint project to promote "giving and receiving" in both countries was carried out. • The Sierra Leone Church extended its training programme at home and overseas. • Some Sierra Leone ministers encouraged to minister in churches in other countries. • The Sierra Leone Church gained new confidence.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earlier generations of missionaries and the Missionary Society were authoritarian, patronising and even dictatorial. This seriously restricted the growth of an indigenous ministry. • There must be equality in ministry and mission in the sight of God even though the churches differ greatly in their resources. • Missionary culture had some negative effects upon African culture and customs of giving and receiving. 	<p>Consultations of this kind should be held periodically between the British Methodist Church and others and between churches in different political territories in Africa. They would build up the life of the churches and their separate and joint missions through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enabling difficulties to be thrashed out; • developing mutual understanding and partnerships; • shaping policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People in Sierra Leone took to the consultative process. • The high potential for constructive change and development in short consultations.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Three. A Traveller's Parish by Sean Farrell who is a Roman Catholic religious, a member of the Order of St Vincent de Paul. He was the Parish Priest of the Travellers' Parish in the Dublin Diocese. Now he is the novice master for his Order.</p> <p>He is in his late 30's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 8 years.</p> <p>See pp 121-131</p>	<p>Sean Farrell describes radical and creative changes in the nature, ministry and work of the Travellers' Parish. This happened through priests and settled people working collaboratively with Travellers; through Travellers and settled people together studying Travellers' culture through pilgrimages and projects and then educating settled people, particularly teachers and priests in training, about this culture. He tells how the <i>avec</i> approach and Avec consultancy services helped him to facilitate these changes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parish Team changed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in size and composition (travellers and women became equal partners); • in approach (from being involved in reactive ministry and crisis management to being proactive in development programmes). • The Travellers' Parish changed from one being built into the settled church to one being built into the Travellers' culture. • Settled people engaged in education and ministry were inducted into Travellers' culture by Travellers and settled people.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conflicts and stresses which were induced by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) making the team inclusive of women, travellers and laity as well as men, settled people, religious and ordained; (b) priests becoming more involved with working with the travellers on their issues and less involved in traditional liturgical and sacramental functions. • The Travellers' Parish involved working for the development of communities which are not geographically stable but most of the community development literature is about developing stable communities. • The processes of Travellers and settled workers together gathering information about Travellers' culture, reflecting on it and using it to educate others is creative. • The theology underlying collaboration. • Priests have to work with communities but they are not community workers; sacramental ministry plus community work is a creative combination for priestly ministry in church and society. • Value of consultancy sessions. 	<p>Learning to work collectively in the Church and with all people of good will is of vital importance to the mission and ministry of the Church.</p>	<p>The cycles of change that occurred and those things which enabled them and endowed them with creative power.</p>

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Four. The Conference of Religious by Gabriel Robin who is a member of a Roman Catholic religious order, the Canonesses of St. Augustine and the General Secretary of the Conference of the Religious.</p> <p>Gabriel is in her 50's and has been using aspect of the <i>avec</i> approach for 9 years.</p> <p>See pp 131-137</p>	<p>Gabriel Robin describes how the use of the <i>avec</i> approach by members of the Conference of Religious and Avec staff helped the Executive of the Conference to prepare for a historic first meeting with the bishops of England and Wales and to develop the work of the Conference and to revise its organizational structures. She tells how useful were the Avec consultations for people at regional and national levels. She shows how the <i>avec</i> approach helps practitioners to work to realities and from them to the underlying theory and theology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gabriel's ability and confidence to prepare for and to promote open participation greatly increased. • Conference of Religious became a more effective organization for development and prophetic action through being restructured so that members can work more effectively to the parts and the whole. • New members can participate more effectively in the Conference of Religious because of the way that they are now inducted into its mysteries. • Formation of a Community Development Unit and an Association for Facilitators and inauguration of courses for new provincials. • Better relationships between Contemplative and Apostolic religious through consultations led by Avec staff. • Better chapter meetings.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value of preparation for meetings and events. • The importance of facilitating each successive phase of task group work by adjusting procedures and re-designing facilitating structures to promote and sustain creative interaction between participants. • Avec as an educative process which helps practitioners to clarify, conceptualise and to work from actualities to theory/theology rather than the other way round. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent work consultancy services are very important. They need to be readily available to individuals, groups, churches and organizations. • The Avec consultations for people with responsibilities at regional and national level were excellent. They are needed to help bishops and leaders to learn and value ways of consulting people and promoting participation. • There is no substitute for the kind of hard thinking promoted and enabled by Avec. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for participation. • Reflective practitioners and reflective communities.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Five. Religious Orders by Maureen Conner who is a religious, a member of the English Congregation of the Sisters of the Assumption. A headmistress who became Director of "Education for Parish Services." Now she is living and working in an area of acute need in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.</p> <p>Maureen is in her late 50's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 6 years.</p> <p>See pp 137-149</p>	<p>Maureen Conner describes how she first came to <i>Avec</i> soon after being appointed the first Director of Education for Parish Services to seek help with the new courses she was about to organize for lay people. She was persuaded to attend a ten-day course. Initially this was frustrating; eventually it was helpful. She then describes how she worked with Catherine Widdicombe for over two years facilitating processes of radical review in a religious order through a series of meetings which culminated in sessions of the chapter. She goes into some of the difficulties they experienced in using the <i>avec</i> approach, assesses the positive outcomes and what really caused it to be helpful. She says that one of the strengths of the <i>avec</i> approach is that it has theological underpinning and self-evidently reflects reality. She reflects on the pragmatic importance of the approach to religious women who, released from some aspect of male domination through Vatican II, are busily engaged in introducing new ways of living and working from the margins of church power and structures. She notes the importance of the <i>avec</i> approach to help people in the deprived area to overcome their tendency to defer to priests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maureen says she was helped to recognise her innate ability for creative listening. • The <i>avec</i> approach has helped her to work more effectively to head (through facilitating rational thought) and heart (through increasing her awareness of peoples' feelings and her confidence to explore the emotional side). • She got from <i>Avec</i> ideas for courses for lay people and for tackling organizational problems – but only after some frustrations. • Insights into organizations and their development. • Experience of putting the <i>avec</i> approach to work in difficult situations and of facilitating chapters.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The praxis of using the <i>avec</i> approach to facilitate chapters. • The value and theological significance of the <i>avec</i> approach in the processes of the renewal of religious life which stems from Vatican II. • Why women have been in the vanguard of pursuing religious renewal and using the <i>avec</i> and associated approaches. • Practical and theological implications of women working for survival and development from positions of structural powerlessness and the significance of the <i>avec</i> approach. • The danger of any suggestion that the <i>avec</i> approach has the whole answer. 	<p>"Look, here is something we see can work. It is not a high-tech, high profile method. But it has affinities with the method God uses. So it has got to have something going for it."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing into complex organizations consultancy processes which to them are extraordinary action systems. • The relevance of the non-directive approach to people without power and living on the margins of church and society. • The <i>avec</i> approach and the psycho-dynamics of groups and communities.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>One. Facing Big Changes Together by Rosemary and Howard Mellor who are Methodists. Rosemary is a housewife and teacher. Howard was the Director of Evangelism for the Methodist Church when interviewed and is now Principal of Cliff College. Rosemary and Howard are in their 40's. Rosemary had experienced the <i>avec</i> approach for one year; Howard has been using it for 18 years. See pp 150-156</p>	<p>Rosemary and Howard Mellor describe the considerable benefits of consultancy sessions which helped them to think through significant changes in their separate and joint vocations and the far-reaching effects of Howard becoming the Principal of Cliff College. Rosemary describes in some detail what it was like to be on the receiving end, as it were, of the consultancy process and just what made the sessions effective for her.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rosemary felt she and her vocation were affirmed. Howard felt that Rosemary's profession was seen to be on a par with his. • Both felt more confident about the principalship and Rosemary more confident about returning to teaching. • The 'conversations were contract making', both felt it deepened their commitments to each other's vocation and their joint vocation. • They drew upon the mutual understanding gained through the consultation, built on the common ground and used the reference points established.
<p>Two. United in Vocation, Marriage and Approach by Diane Clutterbuck, a Methodist Deaconess, Overseas Service Secretary for the Methodist Church Overseas Division. Diane is in her mid 40's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 14 years. See pp 157-162</p>	<p>Diane Clutterbuck describes the profound and positive far-reaching effects a work consultancy course for missionaries returning to work in the UK had upon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her work and that of her husband, Richard, a Methodist minister; • the way they have subsequently worked at their separate and joint vocations related to Christian ministry and marriage. <p>She also notes effects of vocational consultancy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped them to understand more of the complex interplay between their separate and joint commitments to ministry and to their marriage, to see just how their ministries were complementary, to integrate their commitments to these vocations and to establish guidelines for living and working them out. • The <i>avec</i> approach became a central and common denominator to their marriage and ministry. • Consultancy helped Diane to work through tricky vocational issues and the emotions they engendered.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vital importance and the far-reaching effects of both parties to the sessions and their vocations being taken seriously by each other and the consultant. • Precisely what made the sessions effective. • The importance of the approach and the relationships it induces being different from those Rosemary associated with counselling. 	<p>These kinds of consultations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • should be generally available to couples; • need to be part of appraisal processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The elements of the approach identified by Rosemary and the significance of her being able to do so after such a limited experience of it. • Differences between vocational consultancy, work consultancy and counselling.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing the course together was very important. • The importance of the <i>we</i> pronoun in marriage and ministry. • Vocation as a key reference point rather than jobs or career. 	<p>The need for vocational services is implicit in this story.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of work <i>and</i> vocational consultancy services. • The cumulative advantages of consultants acting as work and vocational consultants to the same people.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Three. A New Work Culture by Brian Woodcock who is a United Reformed Minister of Trinity United Reformed Church/Methodist Church and Alcester Methodist Church in Redditch.</p> <p>Brian is in his 50's and has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 21 years.</p> <p>See pp 162-177</p>	<p>Brain Woodcock demonstrates the effective use of the <i>avec</i> approach to a wide range of local, in-service and consultancy work with religious and secular groups and discusses critical incidents that occurred. He describes and reflects upon an early attempt that misfired of transporting the outcome of consultancy sessions on an <i>Avec</i> course to his previous work situation, Greenwich. He stresses the need to internalise the approach and describes the difficulties he faced over many years as a consequence of acting before he had done so.</p> <p>This experience he contrasts with a phase of ministry when he had internalised it. He pinpoints attitudes and values underlying the <i>avec</i> approach and things which in his experience prevent people from using it. For Brian the <i>avec</i> approach generates a new and highly desirable work culture.</p>	<p>Since 1982 he has been deeply involved in <i>Avec</i> and in its training and consultancy programme, an experience which he says he would not have missed because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it has been of great value to him as a person and as a worker; • he has grown a lot through it; • it has helped him to stand back from work and life and re-assess, think laterally and set new targets; • that he is a different person through his involvement with <i>Avec</i>.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach and attitude take precedence over skills and methods. • Internalising the <i>avec</i> approach is essential to its effective practise. • Experiences and significant features of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receiving <i>and</i> giving consultancy help; • providing consultancy help in private sessions and on courses <i>and</i> to groups in their organizational setting; • alternating in a consultancy relationship between the roles of consultant and consultor. • Consultancy processes can be adversely affected when consultors have a sense of gratitude and indebtedness towards their consultants. • Importance of diagrams in helping people to conceptualise and use the right side of the brain. • The <i>avec</i> and other approaches and underlying beliefs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Church must learn from what has been experienced in <i>Avec</i>. • <i>Avec</i> is a treasure that must not be lost. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of practitioners making approaches their own through assimilating rather than adopting them. • Human and spiritual attributes required of people who act as consultants to each other. • Undesirable effects of a sense of indebtedness and gratitude in a consultancy relationship.

The Person	The Story	Consequences and effects
<p>Four. Furlough Courses and Consultations by Rosalind Colwill who is a Roman Catholic and has been working as a mission partner (missionary) with the Methodist Church Nigeria for fifteen years. After working in Uzuakoli leprosy settlement she founded Amaudo, a therapeutic, empowering and rehabilitative community for mentally ill destitute people. Ros, in her early 40's, was awarded an MBE for "services to the mentally ill in Nigeria". She has been using the <i>avec</i> approach for 12 years. See pp 177-191</p>	<p>Rosalind Colwill describes the invaluable help she has received in relation to her work and her professional development through a series of <i>Avec</i> furlough courses and consultancy services over a period of eleven years. In order to pinpoint the nature of the help she received Ros describes the work of Amaudo and issues she worked on during her 1995 furlough. She also describes the reconciling effects on conflict and faction in the Methodist Church Nigeria and dissonance between the British and Nigerian Methodist Churches of a consultation serviced by <i>Avec</i> in 1986.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant help in developing Uzuakoli and Amaudo. • Helped her professional development. • Using to great advantage in her work with volunteers and mentally ill destitute people the methods and skills learnt through the furlough courses. • Recalled to the importance of working <i>with</i> people and empowering them and enabled to correct the adverse effects living in a predominantly authoritarian culture has upon the way she goes about things. • Seeing problems in a new way had revolutionary effects. • Methodist Church in Nigeria acquired consultative skills and used them to resolve internal conflicts.

Principal points made	What they wish to say to the Church	Observations and impressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>avec</i> approach helps with basics – how things are done and why – and overall work processes. • <i>Avec</i> does not solve problems for you; it helps you to solve them with the people with whom you work; it turns them round. • The methods enable people to really help each other who have <i>not</i> got first hand experience of each other's situations. • Furlough courses have the edge over work consultancy sessions because they are reflective communities providing opportunities to extend the participant's experience through learning of the work of others and how to act as co-consultants to each other. • The use of workers' observations of residents' behaviour to prescribe appropriate treatment. 	<p><i>Avec</i> type provisions and services for mission partners are important and must be maintained.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities for practitioners to meet in temporary reflective communities in this and other countries is so beneficial that it should be part of the investment in any labour force. • Co-consultancy course promote co-operation rather than competition and build practitioners, and especially those working in isolation, into a wider communion of practitioners. • Participant observation methods as developed through anthropology and community studies are relevant to work in church or society for development. • There is a need to model the interaction between authoritarian and non-authoritarian aspects of development projects and their host communities.

APPENDIX: CURRENT AVEC TYPE RESOURCES

In this appendix I note briefly those *avec* type resources known to me. I have limited myself entirely to those things which are based directly upon the approaches, methods and services referred to in this book. Approaches and services significantly similar abound which could also help to meet these needs. But it is beyond the scope of this book to survey, describe and compare them. That is a task for the reader to do in relation to resources available to them and for others who can take a more objective and independent view of the different resources than I am able to do.

This appendix contains information which could be of help to three possible groups of readers: practitioners who wish to learn more about the approaches and methods and to acquire the skills; Church leaders and those engaged in pastoral management who wish to ensure that practitioners (lay, ordained and religious, paid and voluntary) are adequately equipped for their work and have the support they need; those responsible for pre- and in-service training of the Church's work-force.

One: LITERATURE

Literature is available for those who wish to study the approach privately or in groups. Details of the principal books are listed below. They are arranged in the following study sequence. Books which help people:

- to get the feel of the approach (Personal Testimonies);
- to see it in action (Examples);
- to learn how to practise the approach and use the methods and to study the underlying theory and theology (Practical Aids);
- to examine the basic concepts (Basic Concepts);
- to consider ways of training others in the approach and providing consultancy services (Promoting Church and Community Development).

These are not watertight categories: practice, theory and theology are intimately connected and cross referenced.

Personal Testimonies

Widdicombe, Catherine & Lovell, George (1987) *Our Church and Community Development Stories* (Avec Publications) 16pp

Examples of this Approach to Church and Community Development Work in Practice

Lovell, George & Widdicombe, Catherine (1978) *Churches and Communities: An Approach to Development in the Local Church* (Search Press) 218pp.

Grundy, Malcolm (Editor) (1995) *The Parchmore Partnership: George Lovell, Garth Rogers and Peter Sharrocks* (Chester House Publications) 189pp.

Practical Aids to Working with Practitioners, Groups and Communities and to Non-directive Work Consultancy

Widdicombe, Catherine (1994) *Group Meetings That Work: A practical guide for working with different kinds of groups* (St Pauls) 205pp.

Lovell, George (1991) *Diagrammatic Modelling: An aid to theological reflection in church and community development work* (An Avec Publication originally published as Occasional Paper No.4, 1980 by the William Temple Foundation) 64pp.

Lovell, George (1994) *Analysis and Design: A Handbook for Practitioners and Consultants in Church and Community Work* (Burns & Oates) 303pp.

Books About Basic Concepts Related to Working with People in Church and Community

Lovell, George (1992, originally published in 1972 as a Grail & Chester House Publication) *The Church and Community Development: An Introduction* (An Avec Publication) 80pp.

Batten, T. R. and M (1989) *The Non-Directive Approach* (An Avec Publication) 53pp.

Lovell, George (1992) *Reflective practitioners in Church and Community Work* – Avec's 1992 Annual Meeting Lecture. 28pp.

Promoting Church and Community Development

Lovell, George (1982) *Human and Religious Factors in Church and Community Work* – Based on the Beckley Social Service Lecture 1981, Grail Publications. 64pp.

Lovell, George (1996) *Avec: Agency and Approach* – (An Avec Publication) 192pp.

Catherine Widdicombe and I, in association with the Grail and with the backing of a charitable trust, have set up "Avec Resources for people working in church and community". The aim is to make books and papers more readily available to practitioners and to theological colleges and training institutions. An annotated list is available.¹

The Avec reference library is now housed at Westminster College, Oxford. It contains a unique collection of books, journals and occasional papers on community development, community studies and community development projects. Also housed at Westminster are several research dissertations and extensive church and community development archives.²

¹ Avec Resources, at 125 Waxwell Lane, Pinner, Middlesex. HA5 3ER

² Contact The Rev Tim Macquiban, Director of the Wesley and Methodist Studies Centre, Westminster College, Oxford OX2 9AT; The Rev Dr George Lovell, 7 Reddons Road, Beckenham, Kent BR3 1LY; Miss Catherine Widdicombe, The Grail, 125 Waxwell Lane, Pinner, Middlesex HA5 3ER

Two: TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY SERVICES

In this section I note briefly the training and consultancy services available in Britain and Ireland.

The Avec Association³

The Association is a successor to, but not a direct continuation of, Avec. It was formed by a group of Avec associates who met when they knew that Avec was to cease to trade to see what could be done to provide the Avec-type services which they were utterly convinced were still needed. This Association aims:

- to provide affordable services for training and consultancy;
- to franchise Avec courses;
- to offer a support network for workers and especially those who have attended Avec courses;
- to be a tangible focus and promoting presence for the church and community development movement;
- to liaise with other agencies and church and community development networks;
- to be thoroughly ecumenical.

Teams have been formed to provide work study courses and courses and services for mission partners (missionaries); to co-operate with the Conference of Religious to provide courses and services for religious; to promote the *avec* approach in ministerial education and practice.

The Community Development Unit, C.O.R.

The Conference of Religious, England and Wales, in association with Avec formed a Community Development Unit in the early 90's. The unit provides for Roman Catholic religious courses and services previously provided by Avec for superiors and provincials.⁴

Methodist Further Training Courses

Versions of the work paper study groups are used on some Methodist further training courses.

An Irish Service Agency

A group of people who for many years helped to staff Avec courses is exploring the feasibility of forming an ecumenical training and consultancy agency for Ireland.⁵

³ For further information contact The Revd Dr Keith Davies, Hartley Victoria College, c/o Luther King House, Brighton Grove, Manchester, M14 5JP.

⁴ For further information contact The Secretariat, The Conference of Religious, 114 Mount Street, London W1Y 6AH.

⁵ For further information contact The Revd Fred Graham, Earlsgift Rectory, 33 Longland Road, Donamagh, Strabane, Co. Tyrone BT82 0PH.

Cliff College⁶

Cliff College, Calver, in association with Sheffield University now offers an M.A. in Evangelism. One of the modules is on the non-directive approach to evangelical ministry. The course will also make use of the action-research methods developed by Avec and especially those used in the Avec/Rochampton Institute Diploma in Church and Community Development.

An Association of Facilitators and Consultants⁷

An Association of Facilitators and Consultants was inaugurated in 1991 by the Conference of Religious, England and Wales. It is a voluntary Association of people who provide facilitative and consultancy services based on a range of models, one of which is the *avec* model. Most of the members are Roman Catholics serving their own church, but not exclusively so. Various needs led to the formation of the Association: an enormous demand for people to facilitate groups of religious and especially "chapters" (meetings of all the members or representatives of a province/congregation/order); those seeking facilitators and consultants wanted lists of capable people; consultants and facilitators who normally work in isolation needed opportunities to confer with, and to support one another.

Consultancy services in the Methodist Church

Initiatives are being taken towards providing more adequate work consultancy services. The British Methodist Church is considering the kind of work¹ and vocational consultancy resources and services needed by its ordained and lay workers and means of providing them, so that they complement counselling services, appraisal schemes and other support systems.

Westminster College⁸

Westminster College, Oxford, is considering the idea of forming a Westminster College consultancy service in applied theology. This will draw upon the Avec experience of providing work and vocational consultancy services even though the intention is to form a Unit which would provide different forms of consultancy help. Closely associated, also under consideration, is a proposal to provide a training course in work and vocational consultancy.

Wesley College, Bristol⁹

The Methodist theological college offers in-service training courses in ministry and leadership with an emphasis on collaborative ministry.

⁶ The Principal, Cliff College, Calver, Sheffield S30 1XG.

⁷ The Secretariat, Conference of Religious, 114 Mount Street, London W1Y 6AH.

⁸ School of Theology, Westminster College, Oxford OX2 9AT.

⁹ Dr Mervyn Davies, Wesley College, College Park Drive, Henbury Road, Bristol BS10 7QD.

Three
PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN ON AVEC COURSES

Another resource is people who have been on Avec courses. "Resources" and the Avec Association may be able to help you find people who have attended Avec courses and are open to people contacting them about their experience of the approach. There is *avec* life beyond Avec in countless human cells, projects, programmes, churches and organizations. Some of them may be in touch with groups of people who support each other and act as work paper groups. A few of them offer consultancy help.