

# Christianity at Work



Christianity at Work  
Richmond Team Ministry  
2010



# Christianity at Work

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## INTRODUCTION

### Christianity at Work

Richmond Team Ministry has for many years held a successful discussion group that now meets monthly to discuss the practical application of Christianity in a 'work' context. Parishioners and guests from all three congregations have not only led these sessions and contributed to them, but also learned much from them. We have learned about working in environments that range from the Middle East to a Children's Society shop, and challenges that include seeking to transform relationships between different cultures caught in conflict, to the rigors of leading a comprehensive school in the borough, to interviewing a Death Row inmate.

Faith transforms us. Rooted in the real world, these topic led sessions enable us to be invigorated in our own faith, to identify with some of the struggles facing Christians in different environments, and to respect the volunteering aspect of 'work' as well as its conventional paid form. Unemployment, adjusting to retirement and study are all embraced within the world of 'work' as we have discussed it. Private sector, Public Sector, Not for Profit sector, the global stage and the local democracy have energised and entertained us too. We have laughed, prayed, sympathised and sat enthralled through different sessions.

Brief snapshots from the 2010 sessions we have compiled into a booklet, also available as PDF on the website, to offer a glimpse of this to a wider audience. The snapshots' varying length simply reflect the main medium used in discussion. For example we could not do justice to the power point presentation and visuals used by some of our speakers, notably Jane Plant and Ruth Scott. Where we have had texts, we have tried to minimize any changes to them, so there is authenticity as well as complete variation in style and approach.

Do join us if you can for any of the future sessions. We offer a prayerful, graceful and relaxed meeting once a month with coffee in the vicarage basement on Saturday mornings 9.15 to 10.15.

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*A prayer from the Industrial Christian Fellowship;*

God who speaks through all creation

When through work we examine and manipulate this earth's resources

Help us to discover more of the nature of its creator

When we see the best and worst of human behaviour

Help us see from new dimensions

The one in whose image we are made;

As we work through corporate plans and strategies

May we encounter more fully

The God whose purposes we are called to fulfil

And so may work and life, enterprise and vocation

Become simply one in your mission on earth

**Amen**



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## **Soldiering in Afghanistan – Mike Carleton-Smith**

As a distinguished soldier himself, and with a son who commanded the British Force in Afghanistan, Mike was able to offer a unique perspective on current soldiering. Having addressed the reasons for going into Afghanistan, the action when we got there and the action now, with emphasis on assisting and partnering with the Afghans, he went on to talk about the soldiers' and the Christian's view. As a soldier it's an article of faith that you cannot defeat an uprising by military means alone, and where it has been successful, it's taken a long time to achieve a political solution - 8 years in Kenya, 12 years in Malaya, 38 years in Northern Ireland.

So how does a soldier view the current situation in Afghanistan? On the whole soldiers don't have a lot of time for politicians, but the armed forces exist within an apolitical environment, so at the end of the day they work with whoever is in power. Soldiers are driven by professional satisfaction, a sense of duty, and they have a clear sense of right and wrong. They sympathise with the Afghan people and want to help them. And Mike emphasised that the soldier has tremendous respect and affection for his muckers and would die for them.

Now *that is love*. In Patrick Bishop's book "Ground Truth" a young widow said: "I draw comfort from the fact that he died doing the job he loved, for the country he loved with the friends he loved".

Bishop also emphasises the soldiers' honesty: "bullshit", he says, "cannot survive long in a climate of withering frankness and constant mickey-taking". Mike emphasized how important humour is - funny, naughty, crude – in working as a morale booster in tight or unpleasant situations.

Moving on from the soldiers' perspective, Mike quoted Anthony Loyd, (one L) former Rifles officer now award winning Times war correspondent:

'For the more senior officers, there will be scant time for introspection. The Afghan campaign has bestowed them with a scale of responsibility, (NO for) tasks and assets unimaginable even 20 years ago. Their minds will be grappling with live video feeds from drones, the multi-layered strike, intelligence and targeting capabilities of aircraft, artillery and mortar options, casualty evacuation chains, electronic counter measures and encrypted signals....

But military commanders and political leaders have got to display optimism as well as realism, and that is a difficult conflict to handle – particularly given the present challenges. They have to decipher enemy intentions in a battle space populated by civilians, insurgents and other NATO forces. And against these concerns they must project an attitude of measured insouciance to their men. Soldiers do not like to see their leaders burdened with worry. So command must be worn lightly.



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How does one view all this as a Christian?

Is it a just war? Are we there for our own defence or for a war of conquest? This is a critical test and it surely passes.

It can be easy for the enemy to persuade an Afghan peasant that this is a war of occupation when the promised peace and development fails to materialise – and homes and land are devastated by fighting and civilian casualties - sadly our presence can be a recruiter for the enemy cause. Indeed we are part of the problem. And of course there are the inevitable concerns about the practicability of the strategy; are the Afghans ever going to be up to the job?

Mike has always been taken by the phrase: ‘There are no atheists in a landing craft’

He quoted Robert Fox’s article on visiting the padres in Afghanistan: ‘They make an extraordinary safety net as well as being the in-house spiritual guides to the commanders and the soldiers in the front line.’

One of the padres, who after serving parishes in and around Stockport for 12 years joined the Chaplains’ Service said: “I love this – I know this what God called me to do ... We have to be prepared to really get our sleeves rolled up. They tell me they really notice when the padre isn’t there. With you they begin to ask the deeper questions in life – they know instinctively what we stand for”.

The intensity of war causes people to confront their mortality; they seek spiritual solutions.

The padre continued: “They really are courageous and first and foremost they fight for each other – their mates and comrades. Meeting them has given me a completely different view of the world. This puts you in touch all the time and with real people. When they are frightened and broken in spirit they can talk with me – they know that. They pray with me though I never talk about God at the beginning of a conversation”.

Another padre writes in his regimental journal. “I am currently in what must be one of the most dangerous places on earth – FOB Wishtan in Sangin. Despite the austere conditions and the tragic loss of comrades, morale is robust and determination is rock steady. The spiritual atmosphere is strong. Bibles and Combat crosses are at a premium. Services are well attended and my supplies of communion wine are steadily depleted. In difficult circumstances, rather than losing faith in God, riflemen turn to Him as the only sure thing.

I am honest with them when I tell them I do not have all the answers – but they are content to know that – He does.”

Mike concluded with a question. *Have you noticed the marked similarity, the overlap, between the soldiers and the Christian qualities? Loyalty – discipline - self discipline – comradeship –*



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*love – community - courage, sacrifice and sense of duty are all common themes. Of course soldiers are not saints, anymore or less than I am. But life at what we call – the sharp end – does bring out a surprising number of Christian qualities – values - and that at least is a blessing.*

And finally, a prayer

*My Lord, I am ready on the threshold of this new day,  
to go forth armed with Thy power seeking adventure on the high road,  
to right wrong, to overcome evil, to suffer wounds and endure pain if need be  
but in all things to serve Thee bravely, faithfully, joyfully  
that at the end of the day's labour kneeling for Thy blessing  
Thou mayest find no blot upon my shield.*

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## **Challenges of working in developing countries; facilitation issues – Ruth Martin**

Ruth Martin works in the financial services sector, developing professional standards and professionalism. Increasingly this work is of a global nature and there are many countries seeking to develop infrastructures to help them create a financial services sector for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ruth explained that in the field of professionalism and ethics some of the ethical dilemmas that she faced were baffling to the suppliers and clients she worked with as there were different expectations and norms. In particular, facilitation of contracts to supply services could be fraught for an organisation seeking to operate on strictly transparent and ethical bases.

She gave an example of when she was visiting Asia to sign a lease for property for her organisation. She had been told that even though all of the paperwork had been completed properly, that she needed to personally visit a civil service office to have the paperwork confirmed and verified in law as a Director of the organisation, and that this visit would take at least 5 hours, and possibly 8. She went prepared with her Blackberry and other papers to while the time as she moved, with the landlord's agent, from the back of the office to the front. This culminated in a brief meeting with an officious, formal, official who needed to stamp and sign the papers off and witness her signatures on various documents.

In the event the procedure took less than three hours and the small gathering was relieved to be leaving before lunchtime the very hot, stuffy and packed office. In the agent's car Ruth said to the agent how delighted she was that it had taken so little time. The agent explained that it had only taken a couple of hours because the day before he had had to visit the official at his home and make an appropriate payment to ensure that the papers would be signed on the day. Ruth explained to Christians at Work that had she known about such an arrangement beforehand that she would have been unable to go ahead and sign as there were strict ethical processes in her organisation. The official had not betrayed any prior knowledge of the landlord's agent on the day; he appeared as if he had never seen him before. Ruth explained that if there had been a transparent 'express service' that would have been acceptable, but a 'facilitation payment' was not.

Ruth explained that the UK Government was trying to introduce a tougher regime to avoid bribery and facilitation, and an Act was expected, but it would be difficult for British companies working in economies where key public servants implementing Government policies in the frontlines, needed payment for services. She also gave the example of where in another country, payment of a visa had to be in no other form of payment than a credit card. This could be highly inconvenient and many people would not necessarily carry a credit card and yet no other payment was acceptable. It transpired that credit card payment was insisted upon in order to



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avoid cash of any amount changing hands in the border control, to avoid the bribery and facilitation payments of neighboring countries.

Ruth explained as a Christian at work she believed that the daily implementation and practice of our faith, including honesty, transparency and practical ethics, would always be challenging. She felt that there was a need to be pragmatic in countries different to our own where cultural norms differed, but that navigating and wrestling with ethical dilemmas were part of trying to live the Gospel day by day in our lives, whatever and wherever we worked.



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## Death Row – Kim Flitcroft

Kim Flitcroft works as a television director. Last year he travelled to Texas to film an interview with Joseph Garcia, a prisoner who had been on death row for nine years. It was likely that Joseph would be executed within two years, as his appeals process was drawing to a close.

Kim explained that he wasn't making a documentary about death row itself, nor was he directly addressing issues related to capital punishment. The programme he was making was a drama documentary for the Discovery Channel about the circumstances that led to Joseph Garcia's sentencing and incarceration. So the plan was to interview Joseph and subsequently to write a script. The finished programme would contain both Joseph's interview and a dramatization of the events surrounding his crime.

Before visiting Texas, Kim checked out the website for the Texas department of criminal justice. Here are some of the statistics that the website reveals. There are about 300 prisoners on death row – 5% are female - the racial division is roughly a third Hispanic, a third white, a third black - 24 prisoners were executed last year – the average time on death row is 10 years – the method of execution is lethal injection - the cost of the chemicals used per injection is \$86-08.

The last words of the prisoners are also recorded on the website, and Kim noted that 80%, maybe more, make Christian references - to God or to Jesus, sometimes quite movingly. He quoted an example:

Please forgive me. Irene, I want to thank you and thank your husband Jack. I'll be waiting for you. I am so sorry. To these families I ask forgiveness. Father God I ask you too for forgiveness. I ask you for forgiveness Lord. I am ready to go Lord. Thank you. I am ready to go. My Jesus my Savior there is none like you. All of my days I want to praise, let every breath. Shout to the Lord let us sing.\*

So how come all these rapists, kidnappers, arsonists, paedophiles and murderers are Christians. Were they Christians before they came into prison, or have they converted since? Kim wasn't sure he'd find the answer to that question, because that wasn't related to the subject he was there to make a programme about.

So why was Joseph Garcia on death row in the first place?

Ten years prior, Joseph was serving a life sentence in another prison in Texas. And a life sentence in Texas often means just that. Life with no parole. That creates desperate men. His crime - he had stabbed a friend to death in a violent, drunken rage.

Joseph, together with 6 others, whose crimes included rape, murder, aggravated burglary and paedophilia, hatched a plan to escape from the prison. On December 21 2000 they took over the maintenance shop where they all worked, subduing and tying up 19 prison officers and civilians.

\*As quoted verbatim by the prisoner, but mis-quoted from a worship song.

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One of the civilian workers was struck over the head with a heavy padlock which nearly took his ear off and caused him permanent brain damage. Officers and civilians were locked into a room, their clothes were stripped off, and the prisoners escaped in disguise, having stolen handguns and rifles and leaving the prison in a maintenance truck. They were on the run for 40 days – and 40 nights as Joseph Garcia reminded Kim on several occasions. While on the run they robbed a store to get money and more guns, and in the course of that robbery they shot and killed a policeman, Aubrey Hawkins. All of them were sentenced to death. One of the seven committed suicide while surrounded by the police during a final siege before their capture, another waived his right of further appeal and was executed in 2008, so five still remain on Death Row. Those five are going through the appeals process, but their chances of avoiding execution are zero. As one policeman put it – if you kill a cop in Texas, they're gonna throw you so far back in the penitentiary, you're gonna need a slingshot to get fed with.

Kim's next step was to correspond with Joseph Garcia prior to going over to Texas to interview him. He needed to explain to him about the programme he was making, to find out what his version of events was, and to find out what his motive was for doing the interview. They sent letters back and forth over a period of some weeks, establishing a warm, working relationship. Joseph came across as an intelligent and charming man. It appeared that his motivation was threefold. 1. He wanted to complain about living conditions, which were indeed severe. 2. He wanted things – magazines or money to buy toiletries. 3. He wanted to get his story across in a sympathetic light.

It became quickly clear that Joseph was angling and changing his story, seeking to manipulate Kim's sympathy, maybe with the thought that a programme sympathetic to his case might in some way be useful to his defence. That wasn't necessarily a problem for Kim who doesn't believe that the death penalty should be used anyway. On the other hand he also needed to reflect the views of the victims of his crimes, and also to do his job, which was to recount this story as accurately as possible.

And there was another matter about which Kim began to feel uneasy. It stood out from Joseph's letters that apparently he was devoutly Christian – his letters were littered with references to God and Jesus. But how was he able to talk so easily about forgiveness and the love of God? What did he really think about the crimes he had committed?

Arriving in Texas, Kim went first to interview John Moriarty, the head of the FBI in Texas who eight years previously led the manhunt to recapture the Joseph Garcia and the six others. John Moriarty is a big guy, loud, cheerful, jokes a lot.

Did he believe these men as practising Christians repented for their crimes? Well, I - you know, you're going to have to talk to someone else about that, my badge says policeman, not chaplain. So why are so many prisoners on death row Christians? Sometimes I think Jesus lives in the penitentiary, cos sure enough when they all get there they sure as hell get to meet him.

So do you doubt that their faith is genuine? I seriously doubt that they would be involved in religion if they were out on the street. I think it has a lot to do with the environment that they're in. Given their history and what they've done, I don't see anything else that they could possibly



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hold on to other than God, because they're facing their maker at this point, they're on Death Row, and rightfully so.

What are your views on the death penalty? The law is specific in Texas, that you commit a crime and you escape from prison and you kill a policeman, you know, you face the death penalty. I think it's important to - to have the death penalty for these types of crimes. There has to be a line drawn in the sand, and I think the death penalty for killing a policeman is that line drawn in the sand.

Moriarty spoke on how he felt about the death of Aubrey Hawkins I was devastated, you know, because it was my job to catch these guys and my worst nightmare is realised that a fellow officer was killed because of my inability to catch him. I felt it very personally. I still to this day do. And he wept, this big, jovial Texan wept at the recollection of the death of Aubrey Hawkins and the suffering his family have lived with ever since.

So finally - the day of the interview with Joseph Garcia. State regulations only allowed 45 minutes for the filmed interview. The crew arrived early as everybody had to be searched and all the equipment had to be checked and searched. Once inside the prison they were taken through various gates and security locks, arriving eventually at the visitors' area – and there was Joseph, in a little booth - four foot square, plate glass window and a telephone.

I pick up the telephone and I say Joseph – good to meet you finally and he says good to meet you Kim, the Lord be with you. So I said how are you? - and instantly thought – that's a dumb question to ask someone on death row. There's a certain frisson when you're looking in to the eyes of someone who knows he is likely to be executed shortly. Then I said you're looking good Joseph, you're looking well. And he was – he looked much younger than I was expecting, his skin was fresh and glowing. And he said – well the thing is, Kim, when you don't get sunlight or wind on your skin it keeps it in good condition. I made some stupid joke – so you'd recommend it as a beauty regime would you – and that broke the ice. We were off.

Joseph was articulate, charming and very persuasive. Here's what he said about his first meeting with George Rivas, the leader of the gang.

I met George in the early part of 1999. I sat down at one of the tables and began to pray over my food. But for some unknown reason I couldn't think of any words to say. I sat there for a minute and opened my eyes. Sitting there in front of me was George Rivas. Coincidence? Fate? Or blessing? I couldn't tell. But in my heart I knew this man would play a great part in my desire for freedom. I asked him if he was hungry and I broke bread with him. From that day on, George and I would talk. We were both into God's word.

This is what Joseph said about the night before the escape

The night before we ate a big spread and we talked. And we had, we had a prayer together with all of us, you know. And, in a sense, it was - we even kept our spirituality in this, you know, you know, God was the main focal point, you know, we actually believed that God was helping us through this, that he was going to give us this, this was our blessing.



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Later on, when he was talking about the prison officer who was brutally beaten and ended up brain damaged – Kim asked Joseph was God with you at this moment?, but he chose to brush aside that question and talk about something else.

This is what he said about the moment when they were driving away from the prison.

You know, I was like, okay, we're doing it. So I started the Lord's Prayer. I had nothing else to do. It was like the only thing that come to my mind was the Lord's Prayer. And I'm going through the Prayer, and "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come..." you know, I just like I stopped right there because I - I forgot it, what to say. And I'm stuttering, I'm looking, I don't know what to say, and I started over again, and I started you know, stuttering. And George he looks at me and I look at him, and he goes like - he starts it, you know and we just said the whole prayer through, the whole time we're driving we're - we're constantly repeating the Lord's Prayer, constantly repeating it until we get out on to the main route, and we just drive away, you know, going in to the city.

### **Kim's conclusion**

I was left with the sense that for Joseph his faith was real to him, it was as much a part of his every day life as it is for any of us – and anyway who am I to judge anybody else in such matters? And yet and yet - and it was an uncharitable thought I couldn't rid myself of – it seemed to me that he had no sense of empathy with his victims – either with the man who he murdered originally, with the officer who was clubbed and brain damaged during the escape, or with the officer who was shot and killed when he was on the run. His thinking was slippery and evasive – ie it wasn't really my fault, I didn't mean to do it, I shouldn't have been there, I was drunk etc. And if his thinking about his criminal behaviour was slippery and evasive, did that mean that maybe his thinking about his religion was slippery and evasive too?

My view of Christian practice is that it invites us to be more open, more loving, more useful to those around us. My suspicion, and I'm probably being very uncharitable here – leads me to think that maybe Joseph's religion is self serving – that it's a way for him to find a way of forgiving his actions to himself without engaging significantly with the material of Christianity – with issues of love, service and repentance.



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## **SPEAR – homelessness to independence – Ed Tytherleigh**

The Chief Executive of SPEAR Ed Tytherleigh, generously made a trip from his home many miles away to talk about the well known charity based next to St Johns. Many churchgoers will remember Penny Wade, a Richmond parishioner who founded SPEAR. Originally set up to support single homeless people living on the streets, he explained how much more the charity had over the years developed over the years to do much more, SPEAR now has 37 full and part time staff running 8 different projects for vulnerable adults and a turnover of well over £1 million.

SPEAR runs: a 14 bed hostel for rough sleepers which is next to St John's church on Richmond Circus, a much smaller 3 bed Hostel for young homeless males coming through the criminal justice system in East Sheen, a drug and alcohol service working to stabilize the most chaotic drug and alcohol dependent individuals preparing them for an ongoing service, a Tenancy Finder service resettling low-support homeless people into the private rented sector, a street outreach service finding rough sleepers and supporting them to come off the streets and a Tenancy Support Service, supporting over 70 people in the Borough to remain in their homes.

SPEAR goes beyond just providing shelter and they have an approach which has won them much support, for every person they work with it is not just providing them with a place to stay, it's about enabling and empowering their beneficiaries to live independently with fulfilment in their lives. SPEAR does this by doing a large number of activities around life skills (from cooking and learning how to pay bills, to budgeting and paying your rent) and work and training activities so they run their own job club. Every day of the year there are communal activities going on from the beneficiaries to attend. Current activities include horticulture, IT training, a thriving chess club, a book club, bike repair workshops and arts and crafts.

SPEAR's resources are limited and while the charity has grown they have been the victim of the dreaded cuts losing around £185,000 in the last year from the Local Authority. Like all charities supported in part by the public SPEAR has to carefully manage and measure its impact in order to justify the funds it receives through fundraising. Last year over 300 people were helped into accommodation. Some 70 will have been helped to living in a supported tenancy with a further 230 being able to live independently.

Christians at Work participants found this talk most absorbing and humbling.



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## Working on the margins – seeking the Face of God - Rev Pip Bevan

Pip is well known to many in the team ministry as one of our retired priests who officiates from time to time, particularly in healing services and supporting Hospital ministry and the residents of the Star and Garter. He is the partner of Richard and a priest from the Catholic Anglican tradition.

Pip explained that he had spent most of his working life with people on the margins of society: working with the recovering mentally ill, people living AIDS and HIV, and homeless people coming into hostels direct from the streets. Trying to listen to them, empower them, often being an advocate for them, to give them as many options in life as possible. Seeking the Image of God in each person.

For various periods of this time he was also a ‘worker priest’ earning his own living, and giving back to the Church at the weekend, and also during the week in praying The Prayer Book, saying Mass, hearing Confessions and giving spiritual direction.

Pip made clear that he regarded the heart of the Christian life as prayer:, which he regarded as seeking the face of God.

*‘Just as no flower is exactly like another flower, and no star exactly like another star, so no person is exactly like another person. And since prayer is the relationship between one particular person and God, it is different for every person. So no prayer is exactly like another.*

*Each day I am seeking to be a contemplative, choosing to follow the pattern of life given by St Benedict – who calls us all to live the life of love. His little Rule invites everybody to a life of action, which while couched in contemplation, is a witness and presence in the midst of everyday life. For me the simplest structures of prayer – often from memory – are my way to God’.*

He also explained that he regarded Holy Communion as The Food for our life Pilgrimage.

*‘It is the silence of God, the weakness of God*

*It is His strength of my journey*

*It is the Sign of His Love for me*

*It is a commemoration of His death*

*It is a celebration of His Living Reality among us*

*Jesus is God of the Impossible; my powerlessness shows His power; my insignificance shows; His being the Creator.*

As a Catholic – The Angelus and the Rosary were also significant to Pip, reminding him that Jesus had lived ‘hidden’ in an ordinary life in an ordinary home.

Pip explained that he believed that after many years as a worker priest that God was calling him into a relationship.



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He and Richard have been partners for almost 20 years, and have a deep and loving relationship, which they believe is given and blessed by God. Though some Christians would think their relationship is at the very least, on the margins. They live ordinary lives, agreeing and disagreeing, going out to work, cooking, cleaning, shopping, doing the normal household chores, caring each for the other in good times and bad. They feel blessed with the parish and many good friends, who love and encourage them.

He passionately believes that active Christians cannot help being political, he himself being Conservative. Christians are called to live out the Gospel – the Good News where we are. He believes that we are called to see the Face of God in the needs of all the people in the Borough of Richmond. For example I need to be involved in how the local Council does, or does not, in my name carry out its responsibilities to the vulnerable, the homeless, the sick, the old. As voters he believes that we bear responsibility for what happens in our Wards and in the Constituency. If things are to change in any Borough, Pip believes that his voice should be heard, his presence felt, if his vote is to have any meaning. As a citizen in a democracy, and even more as a Christian, if the policies of whatever party is in power are against the teaching of the Gospel then he believes he must work for what is an achievable best for his brothers and sisters in Richmond. There are times when Pip feels compelled to actively dissent from policies being implemented.

### **Pip's work**

Pip explained that the over-riding principle of his working-life was to always seek the Face of God in people he works for and with.

He cheerfully explained that he had always chosen to work with those 'at the bottom of the heap'. His Title Parish of St Mary's, Walton, Liverpool in 1967, was a working class Parish, where one third of the houses still had gas lighting and coal ranges. He was trained to work also in both the acute psychiatric wing of Walton Hospital, and also for one day a week in Walton Prison. After four and a half years in Liverpool, I was asked to work in the Bahamas in both an out island parish, and also a Nassau Parish on the Capital Island of Providence. Because of his previous experience he was asked by the Bishop to work for quite a long time in the prison and also psychiatric hospital. The country was a series of sharp contrasts – grinding poverty and almost obscene wealth sitting side by side – with no pretence. The country still had both corporal and capital punishment, and his lowest point was to prepare those condemned to death, and to accompany them on their last journey.

*'All who do work with the dying come to realise, however, that it is far less a matter of what one says, as it is of what one is, a person who cares and makes that care evident in being there is help however he or she can'.*

'There is a phrase from the Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil, it says, concerning Christ: "When he was about to go forth to His voluntary, awesome and life-creating death". I would like us to hold fast to that phrase "life-creating death".'

To enable someone to die well is great privilege, and it is the crowning glory of any vocation as a Priest.'



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When he returned to England after seven and a half, he decided to test his vocation to the contemplative life at Mount St Bernard Abbey, in Leicestershire. Pip said he regarded himself as a late developer, for it took 7 years for me in Simple Vows to realise that God was calling him to a Contemplative life, but not living in a contemplative religious community.

When he left the Abbey he spent many years working with L'Arche Community Lambeth, with young mentally handicapped adults, and as a project leader in hostels for the recovering mentally ill, and then as a worker initiating and running a crisis house for people living with HIV infection and AIDS who were homeless. The last 20 years of his working life were spent at St Mungo's Association, directly working with the street homeless of central London, and in Homeless Link developing resettlement strategies for homeless people to rebuild their lives.

Pip said that for him, the Face of the Suffering Christ was easy to see in these people on the margins, whether they were young or old. The Gospel was the springboard for Pip to use his knowledge of 'the system' to facilitate and enable them so that they began to have a sense of their self-worth, which some had never felt at all before in their lives. The aim was to give them options and choices which would gradually lead them out of the cul de sac into which life had driven them, or into which they had got themselves. However, Pip also explained how important it was to stay with those who could not change, to be with them in all their difficult behaviour and to hold them with dignity and sensitivity until they died.

Pip explained that healing a person does not always mean curing a disease. Sometimes healing means learning to care for others, or finding a new wholeness as a family – being reconciled.

'I try to offer people space in which to be themselves, holding them fast, but with open hands; because sometimes the most important part of loving can be knowing how and when to let go, and to some giving permission to let go and let God'.



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## **Transformative Relationships Across Conflict Divides. Rev Ruth Scott**

Rev Ruth Scott could have spoken about a number of different topics from her rich and varied working life, but on this occasion she chose to speak about her work in Palestine. She showed us a rich and extraordinary series of photographs to illustrate her account of her time there.

Her main focus was exploring the dynamics of what she called ‘transformative relationships across conflict divides’. She travelled to the Middle East to work at the individual level discovering and researching how individuals seek to manage and resolve the extremely complex conflicts in Palestine. She illustrated her talk with some extraordinary footage, which showed how Palestinian families effectively lived under siege, enduring harassment and difficulties which could grind people down on a daily basis.

Ruth interviewed courageous Israelis as well as Palestinians seeking to work together, often against the odds, to try and heal relationships that were structurally in conflict because of the political and military offensives in Palestine. There were extraordinary individuals on both sides seeking to build a better future.

Her work with Israeli and Palestinian former fighters was particularly moving as they tried to work together.

Ruth has undertaken similar work in Northern Ireland focusing in individuals, and will be speaking again during the 2011 series of Christianity at Work, focusing on bereavement in a school setting, where Ruth is currently a Chaplain.



# Christianity at Work

## **Leading a Comprehensive School. Richard Burke**

Richard Burke has been headmaster of Christ's school since 2004, and spoke to the group about how his understanding of Gospel values has helped to transform Christ's into a successful school.

It was a challenging school to take over. In the year prior his appointment, there had been 134 exclusions in a school of 400. On day one he had to deal with a boy found dealing drugs and a teachers' union rep who wanted to close the school.

So how did he do it?

Richard sees his whole role as to do with service. He stressed the importance of developing and promoting good relationships within the school. And that means appreciation of everybody who works in the school – caretakers and cooks as well as pupils, teachers.

Richard was determined that the pupils of his school should have every opportunity that could be made available. He emphasized that the quality of the experience the children underwent was important as well as exam results. He found that many of staff had lost sight of what excellence was, so it was vital to inspire them with his vision of what could be achieved.

Some changes were simple to make – an insistence on accurate timekeeping, on a clear dress code, on asking for there to be no shouting in school.

Other reforms encountered more resistance, especially those to do with educational methods. Most significantly, he changed the streaming system which had previously grouped children in fixed groups, disregarding what their abilities in particular subjects might be.

The school's approach to discipline was also revisited. So now where there are problems between pupils, the school uses a system of restorative justice that involves both victim and perpetrator.

In terms of the fostering of Christian values within the school, Richard sees the appointment of Ruth Scott as part time chaplain as wonderfully helpful, not least for the role she has played in dealing with recent tragedies at the school.

Richard also talked about the importance of a close working relationship with the governing body, and paid tribute to Martin for his outstanding contribution as chairman of the governing body.

As always, the subsequent discussion could have gone on much longer. It was a real pleasure to hear the headmaster of the school for which we offer prayers weekly - but presently have little involvement with - speak so eloquently and passionately about improving educational opportunities for our children.

In the discussion that followed, the group decided that we should perhaps look to find ways of supporting Christ's more effectively in the future.

## **Science, Healing and Faith - Jane Plant**



# Christianity at Work

Professor Jane Plant is an eminent scientist, Chair at Imperial College, and awarded the CBE for her services to the Geological Survey.

Jane summarised her talk (perhaps rather modestly) as being about how reductionist science marries with faith. In a fascinating and wide ranging session, Jane described how she came to write her book Beating Stress, Anxiety and Depression. She illustrated her discussion with an excellent power point presentation.

In 1987 Jane was cleared of breast cancer. When it reoccurred with secondary tumours she turned to prayer and to reforming her diet – and was cured.

Jane wanted to write the story of her recovery, but as a scientist she needed to investigate the causes of her recovery. Two observations were key to her researches - firstly, she noted that in China the death rate for women from breast cancer was 1 in 100,000 whereas in the UK it was one in ten – secondly, she observed that people with faith do better during cancer treatment.

The Chinese diet doesn't involve dairy products, and crucial to Jane's recovery was her decision to abstain from all dairy. Further investigation revealed that oestrogen levels in UK milk production have been hugely hiked up since 1945.

Healing comes from within the body itself, and that's where faith comes in. Jane talked about mechanisms of depression relating to the structure of the brain, showing how meditation can stimulate the prefrontal cortex and deal with depression to some extent. She talked about how Jesus' methods were also about healing.

Jane also suggested that older religions – including Taoism and Hinduism - viewed homo sapiens as part of a larger whole, where God was seen more as a force that pervades the universe. Our culture's lack of connection with the wider universe has led to the “diseases” of overpopulation and declining biodiversity. She talked about the imperative to put in place population programmes (free contraception) and to understand the connections that bind us together (we are all descended from one “African Eve.”

Jane's absorbing talk dealt with many other issues – including affluence, pollution, and epigenetic. Jane's role as an eminent scientist could have been a series of discussions in itself but she explained how she felt Richard Dawkins and others of a similar approach had not in her opinion, taken a rigorous scientific approach to their work but had found a way of speaking to the general population in a simplistic way that sounded convincing. The subsequent discussion could have continued much, much longer.



# Christianity at Work

## **The challenges facing local government – Marc Cranfield-Adams**

Marc Cranford-Adams, whose background is in public relations, was a Richmond Councillor from 2002 to 2010 and Borough Mayor from 2007-2008.

Marc spoke firstly about the changing forms and roles of local government, from the more tightly structured models of Roman times, through an Anglo-Saxon model of local administration and justice organised by landowners, to Tudor times when Henry V111 started to establish a national arrangement for government. The impetus for later Victorian reform was brought about by the need to rationalise overlapping areas of responsibility - street paving, drainage, health boards, poor law guardians etc. In the latter half of the twentieth century the evolution of local government as we know it today was thrashed out between a two tier system, which with its larger county structure was thought to favour a Conservative government, and a unitary system, which was more urban based, and thought to favour Labour. This evolution continued with The Greater London Assembly (with its elected mayor) replacing the Greater London Council and the creation of unitary authorities in Wales and Scotland.

So, 100 years on, the UK still has a patchwork quilt of local government up from town and parish councils through unitary authorities, districts and counties to the Westminster Parliament or in London up from the boroughs to the GLA and on. This raises the question: "Are we over-governed?"

Marc then went on to discuss the tension between central and local government. Parliament is supreme, but the relationship is unbalanced however as central government is ultimately assured of its own way. Councils have no power to do what they want except within tight restraints.

Three key questions: Should local councils be subordinate to central government and regulation; should they only be able to act in cases where Parliament gives express authority; or, should local councils be granted a power of general competence to govern their own localities as they think fit and in accordance with the wishes of the electorate?

An essential issue for local government, therefore, becomes one of balancing the political power of the centre and localities



# Christianity at Work

The last Labour Government's Local Government Act 2006 provided a new duty for local government to promote social, economic and environmental well being of local communities, offering local government an opportunity to act in a more flexible and legally certain environment than previously

Under the present coalition there is a favouring of a smaller role for government and a curb on the powers of the state leading to lower taxation. Has this found expression in the concept of the 'big society'?

So what is the Christian response?

An essential starting point is to gauge the effect of the proposed changes on the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised, because the duty of compassion and care for our neighbour is taught from beginning to end of the Bible.

Marc quoted Frederick Catherwood: *"The so-called 'welfare state' today ensures standard of care for those unable to earn their own support. This would seem a vital Christian objective ... It is perhaps worth mentioning, however, that the Christian cannot feel that his responsibilities are ended when he knows that those in need are financially provided for. The Christian still has responsibilities of a non-economic nature."*

And what impact does this have on the way that the church operates?

The church has a wonderful opportunity to be a witness as one of the voluntary/ third sector organisations which the Council is seeking to work with to deliver services e.g. social care, meals on wheels, impact of housing benefit, providing an advice centre (advice on legal, housing, debt – there are no solicitors in Richmond providing legal aid), a church-run coffee and book shop, social housing etc.

"You are the salt of the earth" (Matt 5v13): salt is a preservative, rubbed into meat to slow down the process of decay. Our mission – to slow down the decay in our world.



# Christianity at Work

## Volunteering - Elspeth Fearn and Susanne Weir

Firstly Elspeth explained that her mother Elizabeth has worked in a charity shop for many years and given her thoughts on volunteering and what it has meant for her over that time.

Her mother works for the Church of England Children's Society, more commonly known these days as The Children's Society and whose presidents are the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. The charity was founded in 1881 when it was then known as the Waifs and Strays Society. Its aim is to reach out to those forgotten children who face danger or disadvantage in their daily lives, children who are unable to find the help or understanding elsewhere. So the charity helps children in trouble with the law, young runaways at risk on the street, disabled children facing exclusion and young refugees.

Like many people volunteering to work for charity Elspeth's mother began not just because she wanted to help the charity but also because it helped her. She had been widowed at the age of 59 and through working in a charity shop she found new interests and a very worthwhile occupation. She developed new skills such as valuing china and other collectables. A particular source of pride has been the way she is able, through skilful laundering, to convert unprepossessing piles of old linen and lace into beautiful starched articles that are sold for very good prices. This recycling also has the advantage of helping the planet.

Elspeth explained that charity shop work had given her mother a real sense of purpose in her retirement from work and she has made many good friends through the shop. A large number of people, mostly women, help in charity shops, and they have often been involved for 20 or 30 years. They are very loyal and hard working people.

Elspeth said that charity shops are in fact on the cusp of change at the moment. There is a move to more up to date business methods with more paid managers and central control through computerised tills. Shops have to be commercially viable and at a time when new clothes can be bought from high street chains at prices cheaper than the charity shop's second hand clothes, this can be difficult. So, many charities are diversifying; for example Oxfam going for specialist bookshops. These changes obviously have an effect on the volunteers and there is some worry and apprehension on their part about radical change. In Elspeth's opinion the situation isn't helped by programmes such as Mary Portas and Charity Shops which quite frankly were patronising and insulting about volunteers with Mary Portas referring to them on one occasion as 'old women'.

Despite these changes the work carries on, everybody doing their best to maximise the value of the donations that charities are given. Elspeth's mother for her part considers that everything she does and every penny she makes for the shop helps a young disadvantaged person in the UK. That is what motivates her volunteering and makes everything worthwhile.



## Christianity at Work

Susanne then explained that she had become involved in volunteering for a number of years. She had volunteered when in full time work but had been able to do much more in recent years, such as 7 years working for the Citizens Advice Bureaux in a voluntary capacity. She had also been involved in Amnesty International and the Talking Newspaper for the blind; the latter linked to her companionship with a blind lady whom she befriended and spent time with until her death. She felt she had been fortunate to be able to give both time and money to the causes she most wanted to help. Volunteering had taught her a great deal over that time. She had learned for example that she worked better with older people than tiny children, and increasingly, that working on a one to one basis, encouraging individuals in their individual situation was very worthwhile. She had taken interest in the courage and tenacity with which those in need persisted in trying to move from homelessness to some independent living in a home of their own, and that one of the benefits for someone like her, not in full time work, was that time could be spent just talking and befriending those in need. Susanne concluded by saying that she really believed in the Big Society.

## Christianity at Work

My Heavenly father, as I enter this workplace seek to bring your presence with me.

I seek to speak your peace, your grace, your mercy, and your perfect order. I acknowledge your power over all that will be spoken, thought, decided, and done during this day.

Lord, I thank you the gifts you have blessed me with. I commit to using them responsibly in your honour. Give me a fresh supply of strength to do my job. Anoint my projects, ideas, and energy so that even my smallest accomplishment may bring you glory.

Lord, when I am confused guide me. When I am burned out infuse me with the light of the Holy Spirit. May the work that I do and the way I do it bring faith, joy, and a smile to all that I come in contact with today.

Amen



# Christianity at Work

