



Mission & Change

I have witnessed the fact that a number of agencies and organisations are struggling to adapt to the changing circumstances we all face. Key to this has to be a better understanding of the way our culture has changed. Change that has been dramatic, not just in terms of the speed it has taken place, but in its consequences for people and communities. The Church has to be in tune with this if its mission is to be engaging and effective.

I have seen the closure of a number of parishes, especially in the conurbations. Families have moved away from the city centres to the suburbs and further a field, attracted to lower priced housing in the outlying areas, becoming part of the daily commuting community that can be evidenced on our motorways and main roads every morning and evening. Our paid employment no longer defines where we live in the same way as it did for our parents. The insecurity of the new work that has replaced the traditional job for life makes us less tied to a geographical area.

At the same time another movement is taking place, it is the single person that is regenerating many of our city centres. Regeneration policies and plans have included a deliberate move to attract a “better mix of people” to address the perceived skills gap and needs of an area, often at a cost to the local residents and community. Mills, large buildings, churches even converted as executive penthouses or homes for the single middle aged or young business person and professionals. Current trends show that by 2010 in the UK the predominant household type will be single person households. This will not just be young people, but a growing army of middle aged people. This is partly due to the increase in marriage break up and divorce, but it is also true that a growing number will choose to be single and that they can afford to be.

The rising age profile of the population as a whole is another factor we can not afford to ignore. Some will say we can't avoid it because they are the main group left in our churches on a Sunday. Even among this group there are trends that we may not have noticed, or if we have, we have ignored them in our mission strategy. Many of our older adults do not want to be treated as if they are in Gods waiting room. They want active meaningful and creative engagement. Retirement plans and higher levels of income have enabled many to choose active retirement options, frequent holidays, new courses and activities. Add this to the fact that our economy needs older adults to stay on longer and we are into a new experience.

These are the new mission grounds for the churches. For a century our pastoral and mission engagement was defined by the consequences of the first industrial revolution. There can be a danger that we become trapped in an ageing model that is starting to have significantly less resonance for the lives of some people, their expectations or experience. A failure to meet people where they are at because they moved on and we didn't notice. Have we defined our

mission in the context of the culture around us or are we just going to cling on in the hope that normal service will resume shortly?

After all we are called to read the signs of the times and in the light of the Gospel and for the Catholic Christian our social thinking to act accordingly. In doing so I believe we will see the emergence of new “parishes”, resulting in changes to the Church in Britain as we know it, but ensuring it is fit for purpose in the 21st Century.

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The author serves on the following work related committees

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