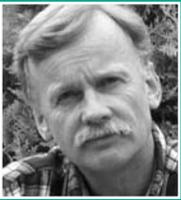


48: That's 'sorted' then



Three sharp but good questions continue to haunt the world of fresh expressions. Where are the fresh expressions that really connect with the non-churched and win some for Christ, as opposed to attracting the bored Christians? Where are the cases that take real steps along the path of maturity rather than beginning with a bang and going out with a whimper? Where are those that include the ability to reproduce once more, instead of settling down into survival mode by themselves? It has been refreshing to encounter a story in Bradford of Church Army working with teenagers that ticks all these boxes. Doubtless it is not perfect, but it was well worth seeing these dynamics at work. We had to go and see.

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Encounters on the Edge



no. 48:

That's 'sorted' then

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Introduction

It is disappointing that it is less than usual to find a fresh expression of Church that is mainly directed to the non-churched, despite the official definition that suggests this was to be their primary focus. So it has been refreshing to research one that bucks the trend.

It is uncommon that an example is making striking progress, despite that demanding aim, and seeing spiritual transformation among non-churched people amidst our post-Christendom mission context. Thus it has been encouraging to live amongst an example that shows this is possible.

Furthermore, this story is genuinely rare in two ways. One is that this community should reproduce within four years of its birth. This has long been one goal in church planting and missionary theory.¹ However, it has usually either been eclipsed for lack of human and financial resources or it has been frustrated by the constraints of parochial thinking with an attendant neurotic defence of boundaries. Secondly, it is well on the way to creating ongoing indigenous lay leadership, and this is remarkable not least because many of the members are from a deprived social and educational background.

Yet these achievements are one fair analysis of a work among non-churched teenagers² on the outskirts of Bradford, headed up by a Church Army Evangelist, Andy Milne, ably assisted by his now ordained wife Tracy. It is then all the more poignant that their story has only been consistently embraced by Church Army, who sent them, and those at the very top of the diocese who opened doors for them. At times, there has been a lack of understanding at local church level about the aims of *Sorted* which has made life challenging for Andy and the team. For the mixed economy to be truly practiced, by duly honouring both inherited and fresh expressions of Church, we need to do better in co-operation and mutual encouragement.

¹ See either the mid 19th century writings of CMS general secretary Henry Venn or the later work of Bruce Patrick and his Life Cycle thinking that influenced church planters in the early 1990s.

² Of those I interviewed in *Sorted 1*, the majority were non-churched, and the remainder de-churched.

Combining strands and sowing seeds

The inheritance

Like many teenagers, Andy Milne experimented with a number of things. One enduring passion became skateboarding; another was the discovery of Christianity. As part of the latter, he began attending Holy Trinity Idle, during the long incumbency of David Johnson (Vicar 1985-2008). In the late 1990s he got involved in its detached youth work and thereby another lasting strand entered his life. One more began at a sunrise service on Easter Day 1995, when he met Tracy. She had moved to Holy Trinity from the nearby parish of Wrose, following a divorce. They found they shared a faith, and together learnt a practice of

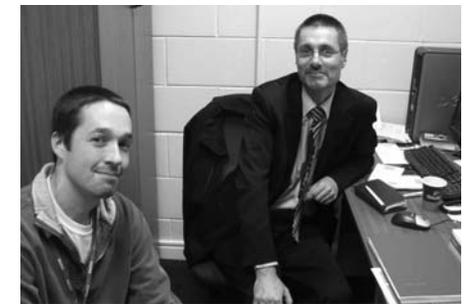


Tracy and Andy

praying that combined a concern for young people and an instinct to seek God's specific guidance. Both sensed Andy had what we would now call a pioneering ministry, on more than a spare time basis. She too had sensed a call from an early age, but that was going to have to wait. Vocation for him to Church Army, and for them both to marriage, out of friendship and spiritual partnership, followed. He trained in Sheffield from 2000-2003 and they were married during his first year.

From the very start of training, Andy sensed a call to make use of all these strands by the creation of a youth church among the non-churched in the north of England. Various possible openings in other northern towns were explored through Church Army, but these failed to convince them or the job was too tied in to taking on existing church youth groups. Andy and Tracy sensed they should be going back to their roots in Bradford and planting a new work. Both parameters are usually resisted in placing first posts. However, the then Chief Secretary Philip Johanson showed his customary courage and urged that the risk be taken. Alongside this, email contact in 2003 with David Johnson then revealed that a new voluntary aided CE secondary school, Immanuel College

with nearly 1,200 pupils, had been opened in 2001 by the Bishop. It is now the only one in the diocese and is well served by its long standing chaplain, Stuart Hacking. Work based out of there might be the looked for job.



Andy and Stuart

The school has a catchment area wider than the parish of Idle. Idle itself is a suburb on the north east border of Bradford, adjoining a number of other urban areas, nearer the city. The village, as it is known, has long attracted humorous comment by its name, not least the world-famous 'Idle Working Men's Club' which has over 1,000 members as a result. It is largely suburban but with pockets of problem housing. A number of nearby areas will feature in the evolving story, thus they are introduced now. Thackley lies closely to the north and runs out into the country. To the south east lies Greengates. Naturally, such a beguiling name turns out to be made of local authority housing with attendant crime, and in this case some scope for the BNP. One of its two estates is 1930s Ravenscliffe, or 'Ravo' to give its local name,

which has a long history of conflict with the next social housing estate to the south, Thorpe Edge. Those foolishly transgressing these tribal boundaries can expect verbal abuse or even physical violence. Immigrants too have been known only to stay a fortnight before leaving in fear.



A secondary school may be one of the most promising communities for some forms of post-Christendom mission. In a more mobile world, it is a natural self-defined catchment area wider than parish, thus it combines a sense of location and rootedness together with the reality of wider social networks. It has its own educational purpose and social life, both of which create bonds and friendship groups, that can become pathways for relationships down which the Christian faith can travel. On the other hand, it is not controlled by the Church, thus there is neither a sense of compulsion of belief nor a duty to attend. The Christendom contradiction of forced faith is never present. With the vast majority of its pupils being non-churched, that is apt. It is also a community

A secondary school may be one of the most promising communities for some forms of post-Christendom mission.

to which Christian workers coming as outsiders can add value to its overall educational ethos and the human development of its pupils. Stuart Hacking mentioned the positive change of climate *Sorted* had brought to the overall school environment. However, **a school is not a church and the proper relationship between the two is overlap**, never being identical. The Christians are there by grace and favour, not by right. It is equally no accident that the appointed professional minister there is not termed a vicar but a chaplain.

Was this to be the base from which to work? It was deeply suitable. Andy's calling was to youth. He was used to detached work. Such an opportunity was congruent with his research into earlier non-churched youth congregations elsewhere and the values he was beginning to crystallise out. All this suited his enjoyment of small groups which embody the friendship groups so important to young people and could be a base from which to build towards events at which young people could experience encounter with God.

In addition to Church Army, the Archdeacon Guy Wilkinson backed the idea, as did the chaplain. The Deanery Synod was prepared to contribute funding. However, local church relationships were tense, and resources a little fragile, not least because of a recent local church split in which an ordinand and at least 20 people, together with their substantial giving and young families, had left one parish. They had gone to an adjoining one in which he became NSM curate. Now both parishes were being asked to support this venture in gifts and personnel. The third parish congregation was small and elderly. These three made up an ecclesial cluster³ within the diocese, roughly coterminous with the school catchment area. Thereby some seeds were sown of vulnerability, as well as embedding some tension within the support structures behind the project.

It was therefore difficult to recruit a locally based team of ten from these churches. Yet here Andy's and Tracy's history in the area was a plus. People to join the team did emerge from their past friendship groups in the wider area. To their credit, Holy Trinity bought a house for them, but it was a small terraced dwelling further away, in Eccleshill parish, and not very suitable to have many teenagers back to. Yet even on the day of moving in, in October 2003, some contacts were made on the pavement outside, some of which still endure.

³ The NE Bradford cluster also includes Calverley, a nearby village to the east.

Making a start

Bishop David James has championed the project from the start. He has always enjoyed schools work and importantly is relaxed with the endorsement by *Mission-shaped Church* of discernment in context rather than pre-determined outcomes. In the initial interview he gave willing verbal agreement to detached work across the catchment area, with a view to establishing a youth church, rather than youth work at, or for, an existing church. This vision he underlined at the commissioning service, although the message does not seem to have percolated down to all the relevant congregations. The mismatch between positive Episcopal vision and entrenched local blindness affects a number of fresh expressions and creates unfortunate tension for them.



The Milnes began with the training of the initial adult volunteers. They met on Fridays, taking time to teach on the values that would undergird the whole approach. All members had to pass muster in truly endorsing these. All went through a three month trial period, as well as have church references and the CRB check. Not all made it. A few leaving over diverging vision, or lack of commendation from the past, is a painful recurring issue in the process of bringing a new church community to birth. But it is better that happens earlier, than remaining unresolved.

Living the values

The values are worth delineating. Perhaps two are most deeply foundational. The first is *relationship building*, which is seen as more important than providing events or activities. This basis I suggest is deeply Christian and connects to good understanding of what it means to say human beings are in the image of God. This has been understood differently in Christian history as to what it means and how much of the image is lost in the fall. Tom Smail traces this path⁴ and advocates that we adopt the view that image is not about an attribute humans possess, like rationality as held by medieval Catholic thought, but about

⁴ T. Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 201-223.

being 'a person-in-relationship'. This in turn flows from how God is and why the image is not wiped out by the fall. At one point he cites Barth's *Church Dogmatics* on Creation:

God exists in relationship and fellowship ... God created man in his own image, in correspondence with his own being and essence ... because he is not solitary in himself ... it is not good for man to be alone and God created him in his image, male and female.⁵

Thus relationships are truly foundational in Christian work, not just the door to force open to thrust some gospel content through. **Being relational is itself part of the good news** that this is how we are fashioned and intended to live.

Connected to it is a second deep belief, in this case empowerment. Put more simply, it is what has become a mantra: '*by young people, for young people.*' Hence I found that the term 'leaders' was reserved for the young people – and the Milnes. The normal designation for the adults was volunteers and they were rightly resistant to my questions that used the term leaders for them. These two values govern all others, which include the third: '*being in their world*' – or incarnational mission – which thus embraces the worlds of schools and of leisure. A consequence of the first three is the characteristic question that Andy learnt from the youth work undertaken by Mike Breen years ago in Brixton. At any gathering, the leaders ask the young people: 'What do you want to do?' This means the young people set the agenda, have to work collaboratively, learn to take responsibility and also set the framework for peer discipline. It is a brilliant question. The fourth value is '*true to the word and open to the Spirit*'. Here orthodox thought and experiential spirituality meet. In a non-book culture, encountering God may be a far more significant starting point than interesting facts about God. It is also acknowledgment that the process of discovering how, in mission, to bring a new Christian community to birth requires spiritual guidance as well as established principles. It is a live art. There are also more practical embodiments of the values, and in that sense lesser ones: partnership with other churches, pastoral care and discipleship including 1-1 mentoring, and a strategy that thinks change is normal.

⁵ Smail, *Like Father, Like Son* pp. 208-209, citing K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.2, (T&T Clark: 1960), p. 324.

What's in a name?

Sometimes a group's name has to be laboriously quarried out; other times it just stands up and begs. An early volunteer phoned up one day to say that Luke, her 11-year-old, was suggesting 'Sorted'. Culturally it covers several things: OK, fixed or mended, well balanced, an adjusted person. The mum also noticed that 'Sorted' in letters is not very different from the Greek 'Soter' – Saviour. The connection is great but the exegesis fanciful. However, the young people easily 'get' that Jesus sorts people and that his people are 'sorted'. It stuck.

Cutting their teeth

At the same time, a group in Eccleshill began. They met around football and so built relationships very slowly, so much so that a few frustrated adult volunteers left. From February 2004, Andy and another volunteer also met up with teenagers street-skateboarding on a Thursday evening. While he never boasts about it, Andy has taken part in county-wide skateboarding competitions, so clearly he was at home, had tricks to teach and earned respect.⁶ The picture also speaks to me of concentration, balance and daring. That is an apt assessment of his other skills as a cross-cultural missionary and church planter. This relationship-based evening was unstructured, yet it could contain God stuff in conversation. It uncovered that one lad Joel had already received a spiritual experience in which he sensed 'I will become a Christian one day'. On dry days they met at the kerb, would skate for an hour or so, and then the group were invited into the Milnes' house for a drink. If wet, they watched a skate video inside.



Andy

A third element in the first years was entry to Immanuel school. Building trust with the staff, notably Stuart Hacking the chaplain and Jane Tiller the head, was important as a previous house church had pushed advertising for their meetings too hard. With a Salvation Army officer who was an RE teacher in the school, Tony Brown, they began 'Rock Solid', a weekly lunchtime club, which included games and also a short thought. The school's Lent festival included skateboarding which brought Andy more exposure and acted as a catalyst for

⁶ A new book by Andy Milne called *The Skateboarders Guide to God* will be available for purchase on www.amazon.com and www.lulu.com in Spring 2011.



Lunchtime at Immanuel School

further relationships. As trust grew, he was given permission to be in the school grounds as a detached worker at lunchtimes from May 2004. **They did not begin with assemblies and RE lessons, for these can look like the residue of the Christendom paradigm.** Rather, Andy deliberately took the Luke 10 messages of start with nothing and look for people of peace. Over the years two rules of thumb in schools work have emerged. Firstly, it is easier to begin with year 7-9 pupils because from year 10 the young people can

be off site at lunchtime and they have already built up their own often busy patterns of activity. The second is that a lunchtime activity among a year group is peculiarly prone to collapse at the start of the next academic year; perhaps the pupils are a year older, had time apart over the summer and there are new routines to learn.

As the rest of 2004 unfolded, the significance of the various strands of contact yielded mixed results. The Sunday football seemed to wane and the Thursday group stayed constant, yet without being large enough to be the base for something further. The Friday volunteer team tried some detached evening work, learning in imitation of Andy's ease in this. Yet the longer learning was that only some of the team were gifted to do this, while Andy can strike up conversation as though he has know you at least five years. Young people's natural initial suspicion of two roaming adults led to curiosity. Initiation into the group oddly came through an egg fight, and then ongoing conversation. These

often happened at the wonderfully named Idle Recreation ground, or Idle Rec, with its own skate park designed by teenagers from *Sorted*, frequented by Immanuel pupils. School contacts, however, continued to grow. This is, in one way, unsurprising as **it is easily the largest pool in which to fish.** As such, this story is really about school-based work, and the skateboarding, exotic as it sounds, is only a small strand in the bigger tapestry. Yet how were they to build from casual meeting to something more extended and specific?



Where are the most fish?

Developing community

Finding one settled venue

At the point at which the venue issue was a topic for prayer, in April 2005 the Youth Service brought a portakabin onto the school grounds for use by the pupils, quickly named The Pod. It was not a thing of beauty, long and thin in shape, and with a frequently failing light and heat system. But it was there. 'Fridays at 6 p.m.' was started. Numbers climbed from a handful to 25, needing more adult volunteers to maintain good practice in today's culture of child protection. Once again, the young people decided what they wanted to do and it included a short slot about God and current issues. Yet as October and wet weather arrived, the numbers drained to single figures. The Pod was only a stage not a answer. Enquiry



Immanuel School Grounds



Thackley Methodist Church

showed that Thackley Methodist Church, its two halls, kitchen and meeting room, were available on a Friday night. The church would let them have it at a 50% discounted rent, and better still it was only five minutes up the road from the school. Andy took the young people to see it and asked their opinion. There was resounding approval. It was great provision then in January 2006 and as of today it still is.

So by this stage, the school base had been secured for initial contact. A regular second venue suitable for a variety of peer led activities, including brief input, had been found. Moreover, some small groups were starting to form. Some girls met with Tracy on a Monday night; another mixed group on a Friday. An older boy, Josh, had another small group at his house, discussing Mark's gospel, bit by bit. The core members of *Sorted* were beginning to get God. Just as importantly, a progression was being built. It runs from school for initial contact, through Friday for a club night, to small groups for discipleship. It was not complete, but it was building.

Three levels, three places

I discerned another connection across this whole work. Church Army evangelist Jeff Kirby noticed, and reported back to us in The Sheffield Centre a few months ago, that in his ministry among asylum seekers and homeless people in the Pitsmoor area of Sheffield, relationships go through distinct gear changes. These seem to be related to the number of different 'places' in which people choose to interact. He calls these stages 'contact', 'engaging' and 'friendship'. An example occurred to me of a similar progression across all three in another context. Stage one, boy meets girl in a youth club – they have contact in one place. Stage two occurs when, after a time that can be short or long, he invites her out for a coffee or a drink, but notably this meeting occurs in a second different place. The relationship has moved to 'engaging'. It takes both risk and trust to make the shift. Stage three occurs, after some further weeks, or maybe months, when she invites him home to meet her parents and this happens in yet another and different third place. Once again there is risk and trust, and once it has happened something further has changed. In this case it is more than 'friendship', but it is at least that.

I think I see exactly this sort of pattern working at *Sorted*. Safe initial contact in the first place occurs, with no pressure. From there, in due time and with discernment, invitation to the second place occurs. Again when the relationships are strong enough, progression to the third place can happen. At each stage there is more commitment, born out of meeting others in a variety of contexts. **This change of 'place' inevitably reveals more what each person is like.** I find it significant that Andy Milne found it was natural after a time to invite young people to a second place: initially to the Pod and later in the evolving story to Thackley. Moreover, he called the Friday night (my second stage) 'changing a crowd into a community'. This model also means I have yet more reasons to doubt whether attending a worship service does much good, in terms of helping newcomers to belong. Curiously enough in my own story, in which I am no longer a vicar, only this month by attending a PCC away day I met and talked with more people in one morning, than has occurred through being a newish attender at a well known Sheffield congregation for the best part of a year. And this has occurred in a large local church that prides itself in being friendly and has a welcoming team. I simply note that this provision doesn't turn newcomers into friends. I must summon the courage to tell them.

I also learnt here that movement to a second 'place' is not necessarily trouble free. On Friday nights in early 2006, Andy was aware the group had to overcome some tribal differences: how would skaters into heavy metal get on with the different tastes of chavs? The bridge across turned out to be those teenagers who went to a third 'place' – the midweek small groups at which the purpose was not their existing cultural choices and so they met each other across these divides. They then brought those attitudes back down into the Friday nights; tensions eased, connections across tribal identity were forged, the atmosphere warmed and numbers went up to 30.

The stage of evolving worship

By September 2006, Andy began to think it was time to build towards a youth congregation service. But rather than mount an event, he privately invited twelve young people to meet in his house. Criteria were those with whom relationship had been built, who related well to others, and in whom he saw potential and spiritual development. By this stage, with the contributions from the now four parishes in the local cluster, they had moved to a larger semi in Apperley Road; it was more suitable to the family and the work and much nearer to the school. Together they worked out how to do worship. Elements included waiting on God, teaching and worship, though not singing, because this set of young people don't do that. The shape was not fixed, nor closely modelled, on the *Soul Survivor* shape that a few had seen that summer. It deliberately included a mid-session fag break, and each segment was short, not least because attention spans are like that. Numbers grew and overflowed the house, so they moved to the lounges of Holy Trinity Idle later that autumn. The space allowed use of projection and images, stations and spaces to draw and write. The young people were involved in buying equipment needed. Teenagers learning to pray for each other became a domino effect, and some started to take a share in giving the teaching. As Andy put it: **'The more involved they are, the better it works.'** He had read Roland Allen at college and was putting belief in the indigenous church into practice, including trusting the people to whom the Word and Spirit were given. On an average week some 35 were there.

They had sowed lots of seeds in building relationships across several different places, and for many in this season 'the lights went on' at these Monday

'The more involved they are, the better it works.'

Public worship is not the goal, rather discipleship is.

evenings. There were a variety of encounters with God: experiences of singularly apt prayer, healings and even minor conflicts with a few local young Satanists. Experience of God seemed to precede understanding, yet provoked the search for it. They chose Monday because it would be easy at school to say, 'See you tonight', there was no conflict with Sundays and sport or the day in a split family when the kids visited Dad, and the venue was free then.

Readers should not think that this stage was the aim, an Everest summit, in which the school was base camp with Friday night, and the small groups were further stages up the mountain. This view is too dominated by a focus on public worship and attractational thinking about the nature of church. Yet in one sense there is a similarity. Only through the earlier stages could this one be reached. However, the whole work is about discipleship and the transformation of young lives. Perhaps a better analogy might be with health and the need for diet, exercise, housing and social interaction. All have their part to play, and the absence of any one over time would be damaging. Similarly, church is a community of people met by Jesus, seeking to become like him, sharing in his mission to society and sustained on that journey by conscious corporate interaction with him. **Public worship is not the goal, rather discipleship is.** In this, all elements count and all are needed.

Balance and adjustments



Discipleship group

Over the next fifteen months, various adjustments had to be made as they learnt to work with this overall pattern. Pressures included preventing the Friday night becoming just like any other youth club, as new young people came in who did not know the ethos. Andy also found fire-fighting these issues meant time not spent with the young indigenous leaders. So they tried splitting Friday into four subgroups - within the four venues offered at Thackley Methodist - each led by two young leaders accompanied by two volunteer

adults. In some ways it worked; the young people rose to the challenge and the members respected peer leadership, just as Wilson Carlile found with the effectiveness of the converts from among working men. On the other hand, it

was difficult to find enough adults, and the young people needed to mix across the groups. By September 2007, they realised they were asking too much and changed the pattern to a shorter time in small groups and having fewer of them. In addition, it was not always easy to hold young leaders on a Friday with all else the area offers. They did, however, establish a shape for the evening which included the invention of the 'debrief'. If an incident occurred, or the evening was amazingly successful or discouragingly hard, the young people could call for a debrief and together later that night at 9 pm they would work out why and what to do about it with Andy and Tracy.



Idle Salvation Army

Another key was seeing the importance of a small group for discipleship. It would include Bible study, discussion and prayer. **This, not the Monday night worship, was the key meeting and the measure of the health of the whole.** As the numbers increased it had to spill out of the Milnes' home and move to the Idle Salvation Army premises. The venue allowed three small groups for discipleship which widened both participation and opportunities to lead.

One external measure of progress was the visit of Bishop David in summer 2007 which publicly connected the work to the diocese and indicated its being approved of. He was to baptise some teenage candidates in the local river, but local flooding made that too dangerous. He returned again in November to the



Another later baptism

safer environment of a birthing pool brought into Holy Trinity. Together with Andy Milne, he baptised over half a dozen, and others renewed their vows, including immersion in water, as they had come to faith much later in life than their infant baptism. Even such an event was not without pressures. These young people keep no diaries, but respond to a text on the day. So making out registers beforehand was a joke. Some parents were anxious or antagonistic, fearing such a public

stance meant their children were being brainwashed. Yet the candidates knew the public stance meant they were officially joining the Christian family. By February 2008, Andy sensed that the pioneering of *Sorted* was complete. The shape had settled down and the progression across it was natural and was working. The first base in the school was secure; Friday night had its young leaders team backed up by adult volunteers. Worship on Monday had settled and was now open to others, though clear its different character to Friday needed watching and respecting. Tuesdays for discipleship in small groups had a suitable venue and was peer led with adult backup. This was now sustainable work, so what should a pioneer do?

Reproducing Sorted?

Discerning, not copying

Moving from one work to two is much more complex than simply adding one. I presently think the best way to sense its potential, complexity and character is to think in terms of the analogy with the reproduction of humans. When a child is born, it has derived its inheritance from two sources: mother and father. By definition it is related to both, but is also unique and different to both. It also changes the relationships involved. For instance, a woman becomes a mother and this changes her for ever, whatever happens, as the child grows, or even tragically dies. The child too remains a daughter or son for life, whatever age or stage they are at. I am convinced the same is true of Christian communities born out of another one. They inherit the values, and yet these have to be given a specific expression by engagement with another context. Thus on the surface they may and indeed should look different. **This is non-identical reproduction**, for Church cannot be created by cloning, photocopying or replicating. The root of this way of thinking goes back to the characteristically Christian way of mission, exemplified in Jesus. As Son of God and son of Mary, his birth embodied both continuity and change. One might say his divine identity and mission demonstrate the continuity, but the mode of his coming through taking flesh was new, even novel, and represents the element of change, a process celebrated in the early hymn of Philippians chapter two. **Two-source thinking is thus quite normal** and the failure to distinguish between the voice of tradition and the need of context has disfigured past chapters of missionary history. Thus the report *Mission-shaped Church* called for the discipline of 'double listening'⁷ in order to focus the need to attend to both sources and thereby enter the art of true ecclesial reproduction.

Such a development also raises the question of at what size particular kinds of Christian community should think about reproduction, not about simply getting larger. Even with something as hefty as an elephant, getting still bigger may not



be the best way forward. That way obesity and ill health beckons. In this case parameters of the right unit size for *Sorted* were becoming clearer, through the size of venues available, and the numbers of adult volunteers to accompany young leaders. Moreover, a relational ceiling existed as the numbers involved ceased to be like an extended family or kinship group and could tip over into an event attended by consumers. All these would deny their foundational value of relationships.

In this story, Andy Milne brought the values that undergirded *Sorted*. However, that was working in the context of a particular school, with its own history, relationships and area to serve. Should he start again elsewhere; if so, where? Conversation with the chaplain Stuart Hacking, who also serves on the advisory group for *Sorted*, suggested a school nearer to the city, called Hanson. There were relational links in that when Immanuel struggled in its early years, partnership and leadership from Hanson had been positive and significant. Additionally, Tony Brown, a colleague in the early days, was doing work there. Thirdly, a group of intercessors had arrived at a similar conclusion. The Milnes' first house had been in this area so they had some experience of it.

More Leaders

At such junctures, staffing issues arise. It is one thing for the pioneer to move on, another to leave behind a sustainable work from which she or he can appropriately withdraw, with effective leadership in place. Moreover, Church Army personnel, or in other cases curates or Ordained Pioneer Ministers, may be on time-bounded contracts and an intrinsically organic approach does not sit easily with this. In this story, Church Army, at the instigation of Andrew Smith its regional deployment voice, commendably dug deep in several ways and it financially could not do that nationally across the board. However, here some special factors started to unfold. One was that by now Tracy was at the end of her ordination training and unusually she was allowed by the diocese to remain in ministry in her context, now half-time but paid within *Sorted* for Mondays and Fridays. Equally unusually, she was 50% funded by Church Army for that work. The other 50% of the job has been a curacy in a pair of parishes four miles away in central Bradford. This means she has headed up what now started to become *Sorted 1* and taken the lead responsibility for Fridays and the Monday gathering. I was heartened that she has not been shipped in just to provide

Eucharistic cover, but to lead by sustaining the work. As such *Sorted* haven't had a communion service yet, but it will come and she is around to keep that kosher.

Concurrently, but incidentally, Church Army was moving to a non-residential, apprentice-based style for its training. Locations are chosen for the quality of the current work, the aptitude of the evangelist to be part of training others and the possibility that the work can multiply. In this scheme, the lead evangelist becomes the training enabler, which takes significant time, and thus a second evangelist is deployed to ensure that the mission work goes ahead. Thus a small missional community is formed into which at least one trainee is sent as a working apprentice. That became the pattern here. By summer 2009, *Sorted 1* was led by Tracy Milne and James Hawksworth, the second Church Army evangelist, together with their young leaders. James was particularly selected for his mentoring and penchant for supporting the vision of others. To have a natural 'number two' is a good gift in a team. Tracy is more gifted in teaching and pastoral roles. These complement the evangelistic gifts of James and are appropriate to a work that needs to sustain its life, as well as continue its mission.



Tracy and James

The Church Army mission base trainee, who also arrived in the summer of 2009, is Nicholas Lebey, originally from Ghana, but with experience in YWAM and a large parish in part of Belfast. He thus has some experience of working at the edge of the existing and starting from nothing. It was also apt and helpful to widen the ethnic mix of the team as there are more Asian pupils in the Hanson school. The embryonic *Sorted 2* is led by Andy Milne. He is gifted as a pioneer and relational evangelist, thus Nicholas is apprenticed to an appropriate craftsman. As the founder but also a strategist, Andy also heads up the whole work of *Sorted*, including when and how and why there might in time be a *Sorted 3*. Handling his own increased responsibilities was helped by him being on the *Arrow* course which seeks to grow the leadership qualities among under 40s.⁸

From here on this story bifurcates and I judge it easier for the reader to follow each through to the present time, rather than hop from one to the other.

⁸ Contact James Lawrence at CPAS for details of this excellent resource, or visit <http://www.cpas.org.uk>

Establishing *Sorted 1*

Leaving well

Andy had learnt the theory of the necessity of leaving, when in college and during his MA. Arrow underlined it by the question of whether the fruit of our work was attributable to us or God. Through the spring of 2008, Andy began the process of leaving the day-to-day leadership of *Sorted 1*. He spotted the element that needed him least because it was in the hands of the young leaders, under Tracy and Simon, one key adult volunteer. First he missed once a month and then twice and then more. Preparation was done by putting the young leaders on their mettle. As some were nearing the end of school and staying in the area, this was fitting. It gave serious content to the by/for young people value and fitted with Tracy's



Simon (on right)

gifts as an empowerer. Both Tracy and Simon comment that it also gave them the chance to grow. As newcomers continued to trickle in, of course they only knew the current leaders.

The team of *Sorted 1* had to face the challenges of keeping the work balanced and healthy. An issue in 2008 was the erosion of the difference of purpose and tone between Friday's games and Tuesdays being more conversation and issues based. Young people can sometimes just bring a friend from one to the other without explaining how they are different. In October they suspended Tuesdays and gathered the core on those days to re-establish the vision and what the evening should look like in the light of that. The core were clear that the disruption occurring on Tuesdays needed addressing. This has been a pattern in *Sorted* from time to time. **Do not be afraid to get small again, to go back to the founding story with the committed people.** Sort that out,

and then work outwards again from there. This time one change was that more young people became involved in telling their faith story and helping with the teaching content.

As *Sorted 1* sorted its own issues, Andy could attend less often and similarly gradually withdrew from the Monday worship evening. It was more difficult to leave Tuesday; that was a parish day for Tracy.

Progress and change

Through 2009, more young people came making more demands on the leadership. One gift was a Kenyan, Moses Bantu on the Church Army global gap year scheme, who was around for eight months on work experience. Asked by Andy to write a report, to help Moses reflect he pointed up two issues needing attention. On the Mondays, though the pattern was still effective, the length of 'waiting on God, teaching and worship had all lengthened and needed cutting back for this set of teenagers'. The other issue was that newcomers were struggling to integrate on Fridays. In turn, that would adversely affect the flow on to Monday and eventually Tuesdays. The way through was for two young leaders, Adam and Carl, to be proactive in welcome, moving round the venue talking and taking the necessary register in case of fire. One of them has become very adept at remembering names and faces. Other leaders were encouraged to make and build 1-1 relationships. Also, Val, the tuck shop lady - aka *Sorted's* agony aunt - has the gift of being an accessible granny figure that the teenagers love. So again the pattern and the quality settled, which led to growth at Thackley on a Friday. The lounges at Holy Trinity on Monday were also now becoming too small and so they moved into the nave of the church. The three Tuesday groups continued, with the constraint being time to train yet further young leaders.

In the summer, James Hawksworth arrived, following a difficult first post. To adjust to the new context and gain confidence in this new work, he shadowed Tracy for Fridays and Andy for Tuesdays and in Immanuel school until Christmas. Up till now his focus has remained more within *Sorted 1* than Immanuel, but I am



glad that is now changing through an increase in his detached work there and in a lunch club. *Sorted 1* **should not ever lose its roots in the school which is its catchment area**, no matter how much is happening among the teenagers who already come. A youth congregation should know, more than most others, that it is relating to a moving target and with a transient community. In many contexts, pupils may be around for seven years but not for ever. Building from the youngest is their best investment.

From 2010, James has led Fridays, together with the youth leaders. They set up, ask the 'What do you want to do?' question, check around the activities and groups, apply peer group discipline, do the notices and the two minute talk which can be at any point in the evening, and clear up afterwards. The adult presence is required by the Methodist church to have a registered legally responsible person and key holder; also, they patrol inside and outside to pick up passing trade and on rare occasions to call the police. James and Simon hold a monthly 'debrief' with the young leaders, unless an incident requires one earlier or cases for banning individuals or groups need to be considered. Peer group 'sentences' are accepted unless James or Tracy have confidential wider knowledge. It is a real by/for environment. The adult volunteers also have their own debrief monthly, with Andy as project leader. Here the balance must be held between what different things they think need addressing and yet retaining the by/for value.

Change of venue, change of legal status



Thorpe Edge

This summer, *Sorted 1* stopped meeting on Mondays in Holy Trinity Idle. A new church-based youth work had been developing at Holy Trinity. Having another different youth work doing something similar one day later each week, in the same venue, hardly commended itself. Andy and the team faced a difficult choice: should they be different yet stay, or agree to move out? On one of his regular retreat days⁹ the word 'move' was

⁹ The pattern that works for him is two Wednesdays per term and an annual 24 hours away. He may read, walk, pray, or sit in a café. Tracy has a similar pattern and together they take a week out in their caravan, prior to holiday, to review and strategise.

the sense given. Nicholas Lebey had a similar experience elsewhere, as did Val, the tuck shop lady. An invitation came from Stuart Darlison, vicar of nearby Thorpe Edge. The area is in the centre of the Immanuel school catchment area and socially not different from the majority of backgrounds the members come from. The church building has recently undergone refurbishment and to have it used more to minister to young people of that estate and bring in a bit of income was a win-win situation for both parties.



St John the Divine, Thorpe Edge

Sorted has had a solid relationship with the Bishop and there had been active prior exploration of legal identity and designated mission area through the recent Bishop's Mission Order legislation. At the same time as the move to Thorpe Edge was being planned, Bishop David James ensured that the Mission Order was completed before he went into well-earned retirement this summer. Four very obvious benefits are as follows:

- 1 an agreed area in which to work to serve the two schools, Immanuel and Hanson.
- 2 imminent provision of a vicarage-sized house which will be a still better base for the ongoing work with leaders and small groups.
- 3 promise of continuity through a diocesan half-funded post for Andy's successor when that day comes. At present, Church Army pays that bill.
- 4 the ending of dependence on a local management group so that decision making for *Sorted 1* will rest with the new *Sorted* church council (currently in the process of being set up) in a similar way that decision making with a parish rests with Vicar and PCC.

A fresh expression of Church with a friend at court has a far better chance of a long-term future and its right to an identity within the Church of England.

Sorted 1 is solid

Despite some complications with prospective partners, that have been a rumbling backdrop from time to time since 2003, overall the purpose of the group is clear: 'We have a passion for Jesus and for young people'. Its hope is

to change a 'we can't' culture to one that says 'we can'. The pattern within each element of the work and the normal progression across them is also known and established. From time to time that is spelt out to retain visibility and clarity, with a strapline that explains that this is what the young people themselves have chosen. The core young people are quite sure that *Sorted* is their church, and most see that being church is more than the worship event. As such the indigenous church wants to take responsibility for its missional, pastoral, worship and discipline functions, no longer dependent on an outside founder. That is good to report.



We've sorted 1 out

Andy as founder has largely left *Sorted 1* as a day-to-day leader. As overall project director, he now meets monthly with the adult volunteers of both *Sorted* groups. There is teaching and worship input, endorsing of values and telling of stories. Direction for the future is considered, and feedback from the various elements of the work. As founder, he now supports Tracy and James in their work as having day-to-day responsibility, but retains a link to develop the lives and ministries of the young leaders. It struck me that here some Pauline practice is being echoed. The pioneer appoints leaders in the work that is

becoming sustainable, moves on in the call of God and yet retains some *episcopate* to guard and enable the life of the first established community, now being left to make its own way. Not all pioneers are capable of this, but finding those who can will be an important discovery for tomorrow's organic mission.

Pioneering Sorted 2

Small beginnings

I wind the clock back to 2007. Andy's Church Army contract was extended until 2011 and he explored beginnings for the work in Hanson school. It is larger at 1,800 pupils and is not a church school. For some years local churches had struggled to make any inroads there. The school serves three other parishes nearer Bradford: Wrose, Bolton and Eccleshill. Its Rural Dean had done a sabbatical connected to fresh expressions of Church and three clergy of this cluster were united in their support which was offered in terms of buildings available, money for equipment, hope of finding an adult volunteer team of twelve and regular prayer. The deanery also gave *Sorted 2* £6,000. This was all encouraging.

The window at school was noticeably narrower. The head would only give permission for a specifically 'Christian' Friday lunchtime club, but not any detached work. This is harder because the label does not allow you to begin relationally. One pupil, Henry, came. After six weeks, Andy sent Henry out as his envoy and he brought back three others. By June 2008, that had grown to 12-15 as they drank chocolate, played softball and talked. A Tuesday lunchtime film club also began with a learning mentor at the school. A Thursday after school group with year 7 lads around chill and discussion looked promising for a time, but when year 8 began, as he had found before, something changed and they became disinterested.

During the same period, from the three parishes, a volunteer team of twelve was gathered. Now he was freer on Friday evenings, fortnightly training with them could begin. Between then and Christmas 2008 they met to 'get' the values. Some immediately saw the opportunity to share the faith with young people who otherwise would not darken their doors. Forming this team was less easy, as it was not based on prior friendship. Moreover, they were core members of existing churches, having both more existing commitments, greater conflicts over split loyalties and more to unlearn. They had for example to get beyond the mentality of PCC type votes over choices between prescribed set outcomes. This was essentially dealing with the unknown and its routes as yet undiscovered. Moreover as working people they were not free to come into Hanson and thus build early relationships.

Nevertheless, as 2009 dawned Andy sensed the need to take a step forward. In April 2009, a Friday night at the church hall of Bolton, St James, was started. Contacts from a year of school's work and the remnant of girls from the existing church youth groups were all invited. The classic question 'What do you want to do?' was put and the Christian content was kept light. Numbers fluctuated as differing groups tried to integrate and disciplinary boundaries were tested. Moses Bantu, the Church Army gap year student, made a significant contribution and numbers crept up at this second 'place'.

Picking up speed

By summer 2009, Nicholas Lebey was on board as a second full time worker. The Hanson work then changed. The lunchtime clubs came to natural ends as the Deputy Head invited Andy and Nicholas to become involved with their 'vulnerable' young teenagers in years 7-11 (this means those at risk from bullying for either personal or social reasons). This Thursday club moved away from the teacher/pupil model around discipline to the cultivation of relationships around *Sorted's* familiar patterns: drinks and games around 'What do you want to do?' and an alternate week including a brief message. In October they got access to *Goals*, a football academy on the school site and a popular lads' work grew, needing entry by card to regulate numbers. Thus the range of activities and days within Hanson was spreading. All these could feed into *Sorted 2* on Friday nights.

Members then brought friends to Friday and numbers got to 20+. As often with growth, the issue then

became enough volunteers, not least in this case because a core of committed young people as emerging leaders was still a dream at this stage. So it was fitting that in Spring 2010 Nicholas began *Refresh*, a small group on Thursday



Nicholas

nights to grow disciples, adapting material from Youth Alpha, at the Bolton church venue, which drew 5-6. As of this summer, the Fridays were holding 30+, with more responsiveness to the God slot. Andy sensed the spiritual temperature was rising from its cold start. Yet mindful of his undulating experiences in *Sorted 1*, he chose to advise Nicholas not to rush things with *Refresh* and to **trust the quality of community grown there and give its members room to engage with God**. Then without pressures, Nick could see better who God is calling and how the young disciples themselves are growing. Allow time for discovery. The same would apply to the second small group run by a volunteer couple.

In my understanding of *Sorted*, small groups are used for two legitimately different things. To start with, I was confused by this. At the earlier stage, they are ways to find the key young people, out of which it is then prudent to explore beginning some form of public worship. Once that has become secure then small groups are for a second reason: for continuing discipleship beyond what attendance at worship can achieve.

As of Autumn 2010, the worship evening of *Sorted 2* is at an early stage. Andy knew he should not start it but remain free for wider roles across the whole project. He needed to wait for Nicholas to enter his second year of training when he could take on more and have responsibility for it. Thus they began on a Sunday night in July with a small group of 7-8 in a different venue, Wrose URC church, followed by a break over the summer. Once more they are unconsciously utilising Jeff Kirby's 'three places' approach, which I explained to them and provided a theoretical framework for their existing experience.

So in three years, *Sorted 2* has laid some foundations. Andy now can do detached work in Hanson and those contacts continue. Nicholas is on board, making a good contribution and will be around for nearly three years more. Those who come to *Sorted* do bring friends and the Friday arrangement looks solid, as does support from the volunteer adults and the three parishes. There is much further to go. The discerning of who the indigenous young people are that God is calling is but beginning. Seeing them learn to operate in this apprentice model is a goal more than current reality. It is vital, for they will in time become the young leaders of the future. Only as that happens, and with continuing adult volunteer backup, can the prospect of *Sorted 3* begin to be entertained.

Issues for the future

There are a whole host of good questions that remain unanswered across the *Sorted* church communities. That is not out of feebleness or avoidance. Rather, it is that we are still learning locally and nationally how these communities thrive, mature, sustain and reproduce well. They are questions on a voyage of discovery.

Legal

How far will the Bishop's Mission Order (BMO) give security for the future? A new Bishop is to be announced soon and it will become his Order. What will happen in five years' time when its term can expire? At present it covers *Sorted 1* as an ecclesial entity and the territory coterminous with the two schools' catchments, but as yet, within the BMO, *Sorted 2* is only the mission initiative of its parent body. When should that change to recognise another community is forming?

Governance

The BMO makes provision for *Sorted* to have some equivalent of wardens and PCC. I think at best this is out of healthy recognition that local churches flourish when there is good partnership between the indigenous people and leaders who have come in from the wider Church. Both strands are present here in *Sorted 1* with the young people as leaders and with the Milnes. Some shape for that could be good. But what should *Sorted 2* do? This area also connects with what the role of the adult volunteers is. Are they primarily members of the church *Sorted*, or members of both it and their parish church, or on detachment from their parishes? Questioning them as a group, their responses varied across that spectrum. How can *Sorted* find light touch governance and financial management? If it does, others of us may watch with interest.

Just for youth?

Sorted 1 has grown through the years from being just teenagers, to the oldest now being young adults who have left school yet stayed in the area. It may not be many years before the first wedding and *Sorted* has to run its own crèche. Then, like Soul Survivor Watford and other places since, the key will be to keep the youth focus and yet also grow a family work alongside it that enables, not takes over, the teenage work. Equally then, a time may come when some

young teachers, not just pupils, will want to become members. But as it does become young family based, what will the surrounding churches think? Will jealousy and fear of competition rear their ugly heads? Equally, if in the not too distant future there are *Sorted* members who are earners, what will that mean for the future funding base?

Family likeness

How will *Sorted 2* be similar and different to *Sorted 1*? It should be both. We shall have to watch and see. One early difference is that the *Sorted 2* area has teenagers that are less socially deprived. This also means *Sorted 1* will have to learn that they are only one expression of being *Sorted* which is a set of values deeper than the forms taken by any particular group. *Sorted 1* will be wise to be supportive, but not controlling. It would be ironic and sad if they became parent-like to the child of *Sorted 2*. Adult to adult should be the goal. A joint summer camp for the two *Sorted* communities is actively being considered. That could be very good.

Further reproduction

Any Church Army mission base will encourage its pioneering trainee to begin new work. That would be the fruit of their gifting. Their missional contacts will be largely local, though not as narrowly as one parish, exactly what is found here. Will Nicholas become the founder of *Sorted 3*, somewhere related and nearby, or perhaps will Andy find he is called to pioneer again? Either way, this is a story that has not ended and it should be encouraged to continue. The investment by the Milnes, Bradford Diocese and Church Army is too precious to be allowed to get frittered away in complex structures or caught up in local church politics. It is pretty much sorted now; I should hate it to become unsorted.

George Lings
November 2010

Cartoons: Tim Sharp

A new book by Andy Milne called *The Skateboarders Guide to God* will be available for purchase on www.amazon.com and www.lulu.com in Spring 2011.

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