

A short history of a parish church experiencing radical renewal

This series was written by Tony Higton in 1986 but it still contains principles and outworking of those principles which will help churches today.

(1) Working through the "pain barriers"

Hawkwell is a parish of some 12,000 people a few miles from Southend in S.E. Essex. Much of the housing is private and owned by commuters. St Mary's is the tiny mediaeval parish church (since enlarged) and Emmanuel was built in 1966.

I moved to the parish in 1975 and after that Charismatic Renewal has increasingly and deeply affected the church. At present there are 232 on the electoral roll, nearly all of whom are regular attenders. The fellowship has been through many "pain barriers" to reach the present position and still has a long way to go. The work is centred around Emmanuel with more traditional services at St Mary's.

As rector I, with my full time colleague (when we find a replacement!) and, at present, one fellow elder lead the work in close co-operation with the PCC and other leaders. These include the departmental leaders (of the Housegroups, Outreach and Young Church Departments), housegroup and prayer cell leaders. Pastoral care inside and outside the congregation is delegated as much as possible to the ten area housegroups. The worship at Emmanuel includes spontaneity within a liturgical framework in the morning and a fairly unstructured evening service. The creative worship team arrange music, drama and artistic contributions to the worship. At St Mary's quiet liturgical services take place morning and afternoon.

The church seeks to discern members' gifts and ministries and to place them in a position for which they are gifted. Those brought to know Christ through evangelism are followed up in a Discipleship Course which stresses the privileges and demands of biblical discipleship, followed by a Commitment Course about the responsibilities of belonging to the Body of Christ in Hawkwell.

In addition to the counselling of enquirers and new Christians, a department in the church provides in-depth prayer counselling through which the Lord brings inner healing and deliverance to those in need. The church aims at a biblical balance between authority and personal freedom within the Body of Christ. A vision for the wider church at home and overseas, especially in Israel, is reflected in the fourteen prayer cells and in 40% of the church's income being given to outreach. Linked with this is a deep concern for a prophetic witness to society.

How it all began

In February 1975 the parish was in real danger of division over Charismatic Renewal. A small minority of charismatics met and were disapproved of. An unhelpful element from outside the parish had become influential in this group. When the parish realised that my attitude to Renewal was positive but careful they began to relax - although many of them did not understand what Renewal was. This relaxation led to much reconciliation. Soon the unhelpful element from outside the parish left.

Shortly after this another significant event took place. One PCC went wrong with various unchristian attitudes being displayed. So at the next meeting discussion of what went wrong spiritually at the previous meeting was the priority on the agenda. After apologies all round it was established that the PCC must be prayerful and clearly Christian in its behaviour.

During the Spring of 1976, frustrated over my ineffectiveness in personal evangelism, I attended a five day Evangelism Explosion Course. I then took my wife and my curate as a team to visit the parish. Later in the year the three of us each took a team out. By October we had seen 24 professions of faith — many from outside the church.

Also that Spring about forty leaders attended our first weekend houseparty in Kent. The discussions about fellowship and worship went well on the Saturday. But in the evening, after an unhelpful Christian film, things seemed to be going disastrously awry with wrong attitudes being displayed. Depressed I went to the Sunday 8am prayer time. After a short time first one person then another broke down in tears of repentance. The reconciliation and joyful praise continued

later in an extended informal Communion. This was a major turning point for the parish in terms of spiritual renewal, fellowship and unanimity for change in the church.

From that time on we had a Sunday after church fellowship at the rectory where we experienced spontaneous worship, deeper fellowship, a little of the gifts of the Spirit and a fair number of mistakes. However the congregation was still sensitive to significant changes in the worship. For example the introduction of the Peace in Communion was initially rather traumatic.

Family style worship

The evangelism continued and three new follow-up Discipleship Groups began in 1977. These were immensely valuable and produced some people who are now in leadership. But with evangelism bringing new people into the church we were forced to recognise that we could not tolerate dreary morning worship. Also we should be aiming at whole families. So we changed to family style worship in the mornings with the children's and teens' groups meeting at the same time as the service, spending some of the time in church. We began a crèche at each church.

The parish houseparty at Herne Bay Court in November 1977 was a remarkable turning point. The teaching emphasized obedience to God's Word; prayer in depth; the priority of regular fellowship in which we were generous in our dealings with and opinions of each other, and are honest, open, approachable and willing to be vulnerable. The Holy Spirit moved many in the Sunday afternoon Communion. Some were very upset by this but within the next year most of these had experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. I had to decide, on returning from Herne Bay, whether I was going to obey God, being more adventurous in faith, in life and ministry in the Spirit, even though some people might be seriously upset by this. I decided I could do no other but it was a very difficult decision to make.

God's provision — and a personal challenge

At that time the only house near our very isolated St Mary's church came on the market and, it was realised, would make a good church annexe. Initially, because it meant a contracts race, we dismissed the idea of buying it. Then the standing committee decided to proceed. Two days later the archdeacon gave us a qualified go-ahead. By 11am the following morning we had a surveyor booked for the next day, an appointment booked with the planning and highways officers and an immediate appointment with the solicitor. The standing committee met five times that week.

Eight days later we exchanged contracts, having got a "green light" from the local and county planner, the highways officers (who ruled it out until we suggested reducing the height of the churchyard hedge) the building inspector and surveyor; approval from the archdeacon, the bishop and the (emergency) PCC; a loan from the bank and the legal side sorted out. Yes — in eight days!

At the end of February 1978 the PCC prayerfully decided to launch an appeal for £39,200 to be given during March culminating on Easter Day. A little money had already been given — but in direct giving, much of it covenanted, the congregation gave a further £39,200 in March. Eventually £41,600 was given. We began a weekly parish day of prayer in the September. One group met at 6.30am on Thursday and two at 9.15am. Prayer has been a main source of God's blessing on the work.

The Hawkwell and Hockley Good News Crusade took place for three weeks in June, 1979. Many were converted, healed, delivered, helped and blessed in various ways. For me the benefits were seeing the need for positive thinking. I had been going through a deep crisis of lack of confidence over this, and I had to face the challenge as to whether God could actually use *me* in supernatural ministry.

(2) The challenge to commitment and outreach

In the summer of 1978 I was facing a traumatic question. Why couldn't free worship figure regularly in the church? I sensed God was saying that what had hitherto been happening in private homes (e.g. the Sunday Fellowship) or at special meetings was now to happen in church. So we began to allow free worship within the liturgical services. The PCC gave overwhelming support for this later in the year. Then in September 1979 we began to hold a 6pm liturgical service at St Mary's but a completely spontaneous service of worship in Emmanuel at 7.30pm. This latter proved very demanding spiritually and emotionally, especially in the early months.

From October 1979 we gathered our leaders into fortnightly share and care groups, quite distinct from the housegroups. This enabled my wife and me to minister in depth to the leaders, following the example of Jesus who spent so much time with the Twelve. The PCC decided that the next curate should, for the first time, assume charge of one of the congregations. I had a "soft spot" for St Mary's and anticipated I would stay there. But God made it very clear that I was to concentrate on Emmanuel. The prospect of delegating a congregation was quite difficult, especially in the early stages, but the Lord had in mind a bigger purpose for Emmanuel than we realised at the time.

1980 saw teaching on the nature of the church. I stressed that although we are a church seeking constantly to reach people through evangelism and pastoral visiting, giving them a warm welcome and all the help we can without obligation, we must be a church in submission to Scripture. We cannot subscribe to the idea of the church being a voluntary organisation whose sole aim is to be available like a spiritual wing of the Welfare State to anyone who cares to visit it, without making any demands on that person. Scripture requires that we are deeply committed to one another; loving one another enough even to give and receive correction (Matt. 18:15—22). To a significant extent this has happened in the parish. Yet we are constantly finding new people added to the church. We understand Jesus' ministry as making great demands on people. He put many people off (John 6:60—66). So we are aiming to be a healing, loving, welcoming community which also asks a deep commitment from present and would-be members.

Praying about our ministries

My curate and I spent 24 hour retreats seeking God's guidance about our main gifts and ministries and what jobs we should be doing in the church. We then asked the leaders' groups similarly to pray about our ministries. My ministry was considered at length by the three leaders' groups (33 leaders). They discerned with remarkable accord that my main ministry was a prophetic and teaching one, to do with seeing a vision of where we ought to go and teaching how to reach the goal. They ultimately saw a ministry of encouragement and challenge to church leaders beyond the parish. Also they were unanimous in saying that I should delegate as much as possible within the parish, particularly pastoral work. Later we appointed an eldership and seven departments covering mission, young church, publications, housegroups, evangelism, pastoral care and social events. Each department had a leader responsible for overseeing its work.

After special evenings of prayer in 1981 we set up various new prayer cells; made the spontaneous evening worship more outward looking (eventually holding Guest Services); and became convinced I should take teams with me to minister elsewhere when invited. The latter was independently confirmed by the minister who led our parish houseparty that November. The first such team outreach took place that Autumn in Suffolk.

Another emphasis of this period was on the pro-life issues — abortion, infanticide and euthanasia. Various events culminated in our showing the film series "Whatever Happened to the Human Race?" in a local school. Wide publicity in the local press and radio brought a good attendance and the whole event was worth the several hundred pounds it cost us.

The Lord was beginning to push me gently into an area I have been very reluctant to enter — that of spiritual warfare and deliverance. It seemed a dangerous area with some unbalanced people involved in it. However the Lord provided an unavoidable situation requiring exorcism which was carried out with the Bishop's approval. We began to sense more of Satan's strategy in both the world and the church, and to discern that there was a concerted occult attack on the parish, particularly on St Mary's with its long, rather chequered history. We challenged people to rid themselves of occult and other unhelpful influences.

1982 saw a major emphasis on local evangelism and mission further afield which we came to see as two aspects of "outreach". In local evangelism some forty people were converted. Also the Lord unexpectedly focussed our attention on ministry to the Jewish people and Israel itself.

In March we began to teach a Commitment Course I had written, which expounded in detail the vision we have as a local church. We then invited members to make a definite commitment to this vision so that we could stand firmly united together. Initially 129 adults made this commitment and the number is being added to regularly. All of these attend housegroups which have a pastoral, teaching, evangelistic, social and practical function. The majority are also in prayer cells.

Having clarified just what our vision as a church was, we sensed God leading us to share what we had learned with the wider church. So in March 1983 we put on a Celebration at Emmanuel entitled "Charismatic Renewal in the End

Times". After extensive advertising the church was full of people from many churches, including the local "house church" with whom we have close contacts. The Lord clearly blessed the ministry of the Word and worship as we put over our vision. Following this we have arranged united Celebrations each second Sunday of the month at 8.00pm. Christians from other churches have attended in reasonable numbers for these times of charismatic worship, fellowship and teaching.

Conference for leaders from other churches

This August a team of eleven of us led a week's houseparty for another parish. In addition to two main daily sessions on Renewal; the restoration of the church to Biblical principles, and the End Times, there were workshops on prayer, prophecy, leadership and creative worship, together with young people's groups. The Lord worked in depth including through extensive counselling. The team clearly matured during the week — gifts and ministries being developed through the sheer demands of the situation. This year we are planning a residential weekend conference in the parish for leaders from other churches. It will deal with leadership and structuring the church for unity, evangelism, prophetic ministry and spiritual warfare.

Last January we began a new system of Sunday teaching courses from 7—7.45pm before Evening Praise. The first was on Christian Doctrine with suitable "homework". Other courses will include Defence of the Faith, Christian Family Life, Gifts of the Spirit, Intercession, Bible Content, Witnessing, Church History. They will run simultaneously, repeating as necessary, and people choose which they attend.

At times the last nine years have been painful - people leaving; many nettles to be grasped; mistakes to be corrected. But the result is, I believe, by the grace of God, a church with a firm foundation and united vision; the vast majority born again and baptised in the Spirit; freedom to exercise gifts and ministries; and a deep desire to "win the world". We give all the glory to the Lord whilst at the same time recognising we have many faults and a long way to go. We look forward to the future knowing the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world.

THE RECTOR'S SERMONS MADE ME ANGRY

Elaine Spicer is a member of Emmanuel, Hawkwell. She gave the following testimony at Morning Worship one Sunday last year.

Having been a member of a church for many years, I only-decided to be confirmed three years ago. However, I was still seeking, still questioning a great deal and disputing God's word. When I first came to Emmanuel two years ago, I struggled even more, and nearly left in order to try other churches in the area, because I could not understand, for example, what provoked the 'raising of hands' in the congregation, and some of the rector's sermons made me very angry. How dare he challenge me — a Christian?! I could not cope with this eternal struggle.

At the end of one morning service we were asked to give completely to the Lord our worries and problems. For the very first time I opened myself to the Lord and gave Him my struggles, asking Him that I might accept Christ into my life without fighting Him. I asked for prayer at the Communion rail. The rector prayed I might receive the Holy Spirit. This was my conversion and baptism in the Spirit, although momentarily I remained cynical, the explanation for the real physical feeling of warmth filling me being due to 'the heat of the rector's hands upon my head'! That evening, only after prayer and study of God's word referring to the Spirit did I fully accept the blessing given to me by the Lord.

Since then I can only praise and thank the Lord for everything He has taught me, all displaying such a deliberate plan. Firstly and most importantly, the Lord has taught me how to trust completely in Him and not to strive even in small things. When going through a deep depression, I was unable to react to people or situations, and also unable to pray for help. Now I could trust the Lord would deliver me from this depression in His own time. I had prayer for healing, which I had previously been sceptical about, wondering if it were right for us to ask the Lord for healing, not in fact doubting His power to heal. This depression was lifted from me. He had taken away my scepticism, and thus taught me to see the need for healing. This led to inner healing, which I then recognised I needed before I could go forward. A striving for perfection in myself had to be taken from me and the Lord has now given me a peace and joy in accepting myself as I am with all my imperfections. I praise and thank Him for working His purposes out in me, for teaching me in such an ordered way that everything became clear to me, and for giving me that trust without striving, and joy in learning even through difficult times. I look forward to learning more about how I can serve the Lord, and pray for any who may be struggling as I did, that they will hand over their struggles to the Lord and receive His very real blessing.

(3) Liturgical and spontaneous worship

Worship is our overall priority, before evangelism, service, teaching and fellowship. One of the main reasons I joined the Church of England was because of the breadth and discipline of liturgical worship. I am still very much in favour of good liturgy. Free Church worship can lack aspects which liturgical worship covers. For example confession may play little part, if any. And the danger is that spontaneous worship will become similarly unbalanced.

However in the summer of 1978 I found myself facing a crisis concerning the relationship between liturgical and spontaneous worship. Two years earlier we had begun a Sunday After Church Fellowship at the Rectory for exploring charismatic worship, ministry and fellowship. We'd had some good times as well as a number of failures. But we learnt a lot. One big mistake we made was to keep this fellowship going for too long. We had been insensitive to the Spirit who had been saying He had finished with it and wanted this worship in the church services. So the fellowship became stale.

We had experienced very uplifting worship in a parish houseparty in 1977 and at Good News Crusade Rallies held in Emmanuel. I was called on to lead worship at these rallies. My professionally calm exterior covered up my deep feeling of inadequacy - not least as speakers like Colin Urquhart and Jean Darnall were present. The Crusade happened in June 1978 - three weeks of really good charismatic worship and ministry.

As a result I sensed God prompting me to ask myself the following questions. Could I dictate to the Holy Spirit what He was allowed to do when the church came together in worship? Could I say, "Lord, you're only allowed to use the liturgy", or for that matter, "Lord, you're not allowed to use the liturgy!" Surely God's Spirit is sovereign. He cannot be confined in a little Anglican box marked "1662" or "Modern Service". Nor can He be confined in a little box marked "No liturgy". I was deeply aware of my duties as an Anglican incumbent. I was also apprehensive of how the congregation would react. But as a Christian leader I could not and will not limit God.

Freedom within a framework

The answer was "freedom within a framework". We began to allow open prayer and worship briefly in the liturgical services. Inevitably the PCC noticed! The matter was raised at the September PCC and put on the next agenda. I knew this was a crunch issue. My commitment not to limit the Lord was so important that if the PCC did not give me substantial support I would consider resigning. At the meeting we had a full debate, noting that the rubrics allowed hymns (and therefore worship songs) at any stage in the service; various forms of prayer led by various people and a local tradition of bodily posture. The council gave me overwhelming support with none voting against. So we began to increase the times of spontaneity within the services. In those early days they were not always satisfactory but sometimes God did a great work in them.

In September 1979, with PCC approval, we began "two tier" Sunday evening - 6.00pm liturgical 'service at St. Mary's followed by a 7.30pm completely spontaneous service at Emmanuel. I shall never forget the first few! To stand in front of an Anglican congregation with only four hymns and a reading chosen (which may not be used) and a sermon (which occasionally may not be given) for a service that might last 2-3 hours was initially rather traumatic. It is amazing how we gain security from well-worn patterns.

Initially we were so concerned to allow maximum opportunity for contributions from the congregation that we didn't give enough lead from the front. The services were sometimes rather like Quaker meetings - waiting for inspiration. On occasions frankly they were boring. But always they were a learning situation. Increasingly we have experienced adoration - being "lost in wonder, love and praise". This can be expressed in singing or in meaningful silence. There are also times of self examination and penitence leading to the joy of forgiveness. Sometimes a liturgical confession is used. Thanksgiving is often expressed in singing, clapping and sheer enjoyment before the Lord.

We were for a long time concerned that these services lacked intercession. This has been rectified in the last year or two as the church's prayer life has deepened. We now have regular whole evenings of intercession in these services. The Gifts of the Spirit figure to some extent in the services, especially prophecy and healing. Tongues and interpretation have figured rarely. Only in recent months have we entered into freedom over "singing in the Spirit". This may be singing in Tongues or in English with the Holy Spirit inspiring both words and music. It can be very beautiful. We found it helpful to encourage people to sing words of praise in English if they did not speak in Tongues. We also found it helpful to ask the musicians to stop as soon as they realised the congregation was about to sing in this

way. Once the singing has begun the instrumentalists join in playing simple harmonies, not a known tune. There is, of course, nothing ecstatic or over-emotional about Singing in the Spirit. We remain as fully in control of ourselves as when we are singing a hymn.

The worship is often led by a small music group-organ, piano, electric piano, guitars, drums and sometimes flute and violin. An Overhead projector aids spontaneity in worship. Copyright transparencies are available from Triumph Communications who also sell transparencies from the Songs of Fellowship packs singly. In order to keep faith with copyright holders we have cut up various music books and made our own alphabetical music files using plastic envelope files in a ring binder. This also helps the musicians to find the music quickly and so aids spontaneity.

We have found on several occasions that people have been converted or healed simply through the worship - without being prayed for and before any Ministry of the Word. However we do emphasize the Ministry of the Word. In the morning "freedom within a framework" service we have a sermon of at least 30 minutes. Normally in the evening the worship is preceded by a 45 minute systematic teaching course which involves a study sheet previously prepared at home. A short sermonette will be included later in the evening. Our creative worship team does very effective dramas within the services and we use testimonies regularly. Various people, normally married couples, lead introductory worship at the beginning of services for 10-15 minutes.

The pattern every two months will include, in the morning worship: a family service, a Communion with prayer for healing etc., a service-led by a housegroup and one evangelistic Guest Service. In the evening we have two or three services majoring on intercession, a Celebration to which other churches are specially invited, and a Guest Service. The morning service lasts two hours and the evening service two hours plus the teaching time beforehand. Worship leaders and preachers meet for an hour each week to pray for the Sunday worship. The main weakness at the moment is that having reacted against not giving sufficient lead from the front we are now giving too much. We are feeling our way towards the right balance.

Leading spontaneous worship

It is possible to lead highly ordered worship without it making great spiritual demands on the leader. It is essential in leading truly spontaneous worship that the leader is intimately in touch with God, fully prepared in prayer and repentance and open to the Spirit.

He also needs to be confident that God can actually use him. Having properly prepared himself he must take the step of faith in believing that what he is feeling and experiencing is not "just him" but God's prompting. He must also have the courage to lead according to his discernment, prayerfully correcting or redirecting the worship. Serious mistakes may need public correction; lesser matters may wait until a private chat with the person in error. It takes courage to lead in spontaneous singing but who cares if the leader hits the wrong note? He can start again! If he does not give an obvious verbal and enthusiastic lead in every aspect of the worship then he will tend to deaden the whole service by discouraging a free response from the congregation. He must often, however, stand back, be quiet and let others contribute.

A worship leader must not be embarrassed by people making mistakes or showing emotion. In order to exclude a valuable contribution he can give a "one minute warning" that a time of prayer must end. That often precipitates the more hesitant, shy contributions.

In this leadership we shall make mistakes but that is a small price to pay for the immense value of spontaneous worship.

HOW CAROLINE CAME BACK TO GOD

Although brought up in a Christian family, Caroline had drifted away from God. A baptismal service at Emmanuel, Hawkwell eventually led her to baptism in the Spirit and her own water baptism.

There was a time when I couldn't sit through a baptism or similar moving service without my emotions running away with me and at least one bout of tears and for no real reason at all, or at least so I thought. As a child I was brought up as part of a Christian family - always went to church and even taught a Sunday School class myself at one stage. I actually gave my life to the Lord when I was about eleven (at a baptismal service) but I never felt comfortable or 'wanted' in any church fellowship, so I drifted along going nowhere and that's where the real

problem lay for I wanted then to be baptised to really give my life to the Lord, but I knew that apart from being a public act of total obedience to God it also ,meant to become a member of a fellowship and there never seemed to be a fellowship I could fit into.

Gradually without this involvement, I became less and less the committed Christian and more like the average believer. At this time I met Barry - who was also without a church fellowship to feel a part of, and out on a limb like myself. After we were married in 1980, eventually church-going became less frequent, replaced by arguments and fits of depression on my part. Without God in my life, although I didn't realize that was why at the time, I felt insecure and unhappy most of the time and worse still, empty and incomplete.

After nearly two years of this, in desperation, and as a vain attempt to save our marriage I went to see a hypnotherapist, but of course there was nothing he could do apart from bringing me to my senses long enough to realize that I wanted and needed to become a committed Christian again, and looking back it could only have been God that called me to that realization for the person I was seeing for "treatment" was an atheist and didn't even believe in God.

Soon afterwards - in September 1982 we were invited to a friend's baptism here at Emmanuel and after that one service I couldn't wait for the next Sunday to arrive. I felt at last we had found somewhere, where not only did we feel accepted but actually wanted to be.

In October, I was baptised in the Spirit, something which had always been discouraged by a former church youth leader. Why? I still don't know, and sadly it is thought as "weird" or "too deep" by many people, even Christians that I know. It certainly does call you to a deep commitment but being baptised in the Spirit completely changed my life; for a start it made me feel complete and secure in Christ, something I had lacked for so long. It opened my eyes to the right and wrong things a committed Christian should be involved in so I could start to change my life accordingly. It even helped me discard some bad habits I had acquired.

Finally it was my turn to be baptised in water and I certainly do praise God that He kept me to Himself for that moment - kept me through all those horrible emotions and experiences and made the time special for me. There's no doubt about it, He certainly is a Great God and has done great things in my life.

(4) Intercession and Prayer Cells

"When the church is stuck, it appoints another committee", said the archdeacon to the Diocesan Synod. This remark was meant to be only half serious, but it points to a wrong attitude in the church. Our Lord found it necessary to spend nights in prayer even when he was extremely busy. He prayed extensively before important decisions and major transitions in His life and work. No one could read the Gospels without concluding He was a man of prayer. Modern Christians -even those who have experienced Renewal - don't always seem to be good disciples of Christ in this area.

Now I've been to some very boring prayer meetings in my earlier years. The same old unwritten liturgy was churned out each week. There seemed little sense of direction or discipline in the matter. Perhaps we felt we were doing our duty and pleasing God. I am not sure we expected God to answer very often. But an experience of Renewal brings a new intimacy and depth in prayer. So often, however, the real prayer is limited to private and group prayer, rather than the whole church and its official councils being deeply involved. This problem we have sought to overcome in Hawkwell.

From 1975 to 1978 there was nowhere near enough corporate prayer in the parish. We had some evenings of prayer which proved really enjoyable - to the surprise of some. For a few months we held prayer breakfasts at 7 am on a Saturday morning. Again we glimpsed a depth and intensity of prayer in those all too brief sessions. Sadly when we started the Sunday evening after church fellowship in April 1976 we discontinued the prayer breakfasts. The intercession in the Sunday Fellowship was never as deep and extensive as we had experienced previously, the prayer tended to be more about personal needs. However in April 1978 we began an hour of prayer each Sunday at 8 am. Initially these were arranged to pray for a special series of evening sermons on "The Holy Spirit in the Church". These sermons proved a turning point for the church.

Parish Day of Prayer

In July 1978 we became concerned that there was not enough corporate prayer backing for our evangelistic visiting programme, which had been going since 1976. So we came together to pray about what we should do to rectify this. To our surprise we sensed the Lord guiding us to begin a weekly parish Day of Prayer. In September 1978 this began on Thursday each week. The first prayer time was at 6.30 am for an hour and catered mainly for those in full time employment. Then two groups met at 9.15 am and one at 12.30 pm. Every Sunday we published a prayer news sheet which included thanksgiving topics for the way in which God had answered our prayers. This reporting back of answers to prayer is often forgotten, but it is vital for ensuring the Lord is thanked and for encouraging faith. Looking back, I believe that the establishment of this Day of Prayer was the real beginning of the good things God has done in recent years in Hawkwell.

In March 1979 we began to express our growing concern for the nation by adding another hour of prayer for this purpose at 7 pm each Thursday. But we still felt our prayers were not sufficiently deep or disciplined. We were paddling in the shallows. It was then that some of the praying women began to take an interest in the Lydia Prayer Fellowship. This is a national organisation which encourages women's prayer cells. They publish helpful literature and hold national conferences. We found their leaflet "The Inner Workings of a Prayer Cell" and the card of the same title really helpful. We began to learn how to prepare ourselves properly for intercession; how to "hear" God, especially as to the prayer topics He wished us to concentrate on, and how to pray in a disciplined way.

In May 1980 a group was meeting for prayer. It was during the time when Americans were being held hostage in Iran. That evening the group sensed strongly that President Carter would be attempting a rescue and were led to pray against any move which would create a worse situation. Next morning it was announced in the press that the daring rescue attempt using troops had failed miserably before it began because of technical problems after the landing in a remote area of Iran. Months later those who had been imprisoned in that country said that the rescue attempt would have been a disaster, leading to a blood bath and worse international relations. We were very encouraged that God had actually revealed to us in prayer what in fact were American Military Secrets so that we could pray about them. Since then there have been many such experiences of God revealing knowledge which could not naturally have been known. Intercession can be exciting!

Prayer cells

During the summer of 1980 we listened to a series of tapes on Intercession by Joy Dawson. They were from a Youth with a Mission training school and broadened our understanding immensely of what God could do through intercession. In 1982, as a result of an evening of prayer, we decided to change the pattern of corporate prayer. Instead of the weekly Day of Prayer we began a system of prayer cells led by those who had gained experience in intercession. Initially there were five cells meeting in the morning and one in the early evening. By the end of the year the number of cells had grown to 12.

When the new system of housegroups began in January 1983 we appointed an intercessor in each group and asked the group to devote one evening a month to prayer. Later we asked the groups to devote two evenings a month to intercession, one for the local church and its outreach, the other for the nation and the wider mission of the church. This was quite distinct from the system of prayer cells within the parish. Now, however, with 18 weekly prayer cells, most of the church members are involved in these so the housegroups just have the one evening per month for intercession. In one way or another the whole membership is beginning to experience intercession and to see its importance.

Running the church on prayer.

In addition to the prayer cells we have, for a number of years, held a weekly time of prayer for the Sunday services. We regularly hold extended periods of intercession - sometimes for the whole evening - in our Evening Praise service on Sundays. We have just begun to hold evenings of prayer for outreach and half nights of prayer for various purposes. The elders and various other ministry groups within the church also meet regularly for prayer. We have a half hour of prayer before each PCC meeting and if a particular debate is getting bogged down we pause to pray about the matter.

Each cell has prayerfully discerned the topic or topics it should concentrate upon e.g. local evangelism, the wider church, the nation, Israel, the persecuted church etc. We ensure that lines of communication between the cells and the elders are kept open. The elders sometimes give relevant information to the cells for them to pray about. The cells, having learnt to listen to the Lord, then report back to the elders what they believe He is saying. It is, of course, the

elders' responsibility to weigh these contributions, but nearly always we find them most helpful. We therefore seek to run the church on intercession and "hearing" the Lord. The members, even the newer ones, thus have the opportunity to contribute what they believe the Lord is saying - sometimes on their own initiative, at other times at the specific request of the elders. After weighing these contributions the elders initiate action through the relevant channels in the church, including the PCC in the case of any important matter.

Whatever good things there are in Hawkwell have been achieved by God through prayer. We also believe that God is able to use the prayers of the local church to bring about His purpose in the wider church and the nation. It is essential that a church moving in Renewal should learn to intercede and to "hear" God for themselves. This is foundational and we are never more thrilled than when we can encourage and assist another church to move into it. Only what is conceived, born and bathed in prayer will ultimately fulfil God's purpose for us.

(5) Discerning our gifts and ministries

"That's what happens when you let the laity have their way!" commented an elderly clergyman friend of mine. He was referring to a minor problem in another church. Godly minister though he was, he had followed the ancient tradition of keeping the laity in their place! At the Institution and Induction of a new incumbent, traditionally the laity would be asked to support him as he fulfilled the task of ministry. So he was supposed to manifest all the gifts and ministries to all the parishioners. The New Testament however stands this human "wisdom" on its head. It teaches that leaders are "to prepare God's people for works of service." (Eph.4:12)

But how do we achieve this? This is the question I asked myself in 1980. What constitutes a charismatic church? Is it simply a church containing people who have had a significant experience of the Spirit, perhaps speak in tongues and enjoy singing choruses? Surely God has renewed the "charismata" (gifts of grace) so that the whole church can fulfil its mission to the world — every member using his or her gifts and ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. A charismatic church is one which works like that. I had taught about the gifts of the Spirit, trying to define them as practically as possible. But how could people know what their gifts were?

After a good deal of prayer I felt I could recommend a practical procedure to the church, which we would use experimentally with the leaders initially. In turn we asked each person (or each married couple) to have a short retreat — a whole morning, afternoon or evening — away from home. They could use the church or the church house. Or they could spend some time out in the countryside. We encouraged married couples to spend some of the time together in prayer. I produced a sheet "How to Find Your Place in the Body of Christ" which gave practical advice, a guide to prayer and descriptions of the gifts.

"Giving back to God" the jobs we are doing

At the same time we asked the rest of the housegroup to which the person or couple belonged to pray for them, especially about their gifts. It was interesting that quite a number of leaders were worried they would not "hear" the Lord or discern their gifts. In the event they were thrilled that they did "hear" the Lord. A whole new realm of prayer opened up to them.

During their retreat we recommended the members firstly to relax, not to strive for guidance. Rather they should concentrate on prayer and meditation upon the Lord and Scripture. After they had "tuned in" to God they gave over their thoughts and prejudices about their gifts as well as "giving back to God" the jobs they were already doing in the church. Maybe he wanted them to do something different in the future, something for which they were more gifted. They continued to give themselves a thorough spiritual check-up, about their relationship with Christ and experience of the Baptism of the Spirit, and the Fruit and Gifts of the Spirit.

The leaflet helped them do this by asking various questions and referring to relevant passages of scripture. Only after this did members ask God to show them what their gifts were. They checked the list of gifts slowly, carefully and prayerfully. Having made a tentative list of their gifts they asked the Lord to show them their priorities in then- personal life, family, occupation and the church. What things should they be doing? What things should they not be doing?

Allowing the church to confirm our gifts

All of this however was only part of the preparation. Another important phase was to come. Sometimes churches have problems with individuals who think they know what their gifts are. They push themselves forward and act rather arrogantly and rebelliously. We firmly believe that the church should discern and confirm the gifts of the individual. So we asked the housegroups to take the lead in this. Each group spent an extended time in prayer (corporate or individual) *before* the meeting for the members whose gifts they were to discern. They too studied the definitions of the gifts and gave over their preconceived ideas in the matter. We encouraged them to expect God to speak through prophecy and warned them not to rely on rational considerations. After all God often uses people not naturally fitted for the task he has for them.

At the meeting the group shared its conclusions about the member's gifts *before* that member shared his or her conclusions. It was remarkable how the views of the group and of the individual coincided. But often the group added significantly to the individual's discernment. Not all the groups were equally mature in their discernment, but overall the exercise was a success. The group leader reported the findings back to the elders who carefully checked them and then prayerfully considered what each member should be doing in the church. This procedure is followed as new members are added to the housegroups.

Early in 1981 we began all this with three leaders' groups (totalling 33 leaders) discerning my gifts. I had previously spent a 24 hour retreat away from the parish. Like me the leaders were convinced my main gifts were prophetic preaching and teaching. But they also felt that I would minister on a wider scale than the local church. That surprised me and seemed very remote and theoretical at the time. Since then however, and particularly during 1985, this wider ministry is developing rapidly. However the leaders also said that I wasn't particularly gifted pastorally. I agreed. Some people seem to do pastoral work effortlessly. I have to work quite hard at it. The leaders said that I should delegate most of the general pastoral work to them. They would call me in when they needed me! This was a great encouragement. The pastoral work would be done better and I would be more free to develop my gifts.

Sometimes the discerning of gifts led to significant changes. After we had dealt with my gifts and the curate's we came to consider the Readers' ministries. As I prayed about one of them I became increasingly convinced that his main ministry was not preaching but administration. But how could I say this at the next group meeting? It could be really hurtful. So one day I went round to see the man concerned — Duncan Johnson — privately. We chatted generally whilst I plucked up courage to say why I had come. Eventually I told him and waited for a reaction. "What a relief!" he said, "That's exactly what the Lord has been saying to me." He became and still is a very efficient churchwarden, although he does lead the occasional service.

Gifts can change when circumstances change

One thing we have discovered is that people's gifts and ministries change and develop with time. As we mature spiritually our gifts develop and new ones become evident. But there is another factor. The Lord is very practical and relates to the needs of a situation. For example in the early stage of the development of a church he may use a person in particular gifts because no one else is ready to manifest those gifts. Later when others are ready he may no longer use that person in those ways. Our experience illustrates this. In our early years in Hawkwell my wife and I did a great deal of in-depth prayer counselling with our leaders. We saw the Lord bring remarkable inner healing and deliverance from bondages. But when the leaders came to discern our gifts, apart from one who just mentioned it, no one discerned this was my ministry. Far from being upset by this I knew it was right. Since then, apart from being called in as advisers, we have only counselled Christian leaders from outside the parish. God gives us a spiritual "anointing" for that but not for general counselling in the parish. That local ministry is now delegated.

I believe there is no alternative but to accept that Ephesians 4:11-12 is still relevant to the church. In other words there are still apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Clearly some Christians have an outstanding prophetic ministry. But equally some men have an apostolic ministry. This does not mean they are on a level with the Twelve. And of course some of those claiming apostolic ministry today may have an unbalanced, dictatorial approach. Nevertheless there are men who are able to plant and build churches, they can do this on a non-local basis and can stand with and encourage other men who perhaps do not have an apostolic gift. Only a few will exercise these leading ministries in a major way. But there will be many who can witness or pastor or prophesy in lesser ways, or experience one of the many other gifts mentioned in the New Testament.

God has renewed spiritual gifts and every-member-ministry within the church in order that we may effectively worship him, build a strong fellowship and reach the world. Churches who do not recognise their members' gifts and enable them to use them will not be a manifestation of the Body of Christ as the New Testament envisaged

A RADICAL CHANGE OF MINISTRY

Duncan Johnson was a Reader at Emmanuel, Hawkwell when the church leaders were asked to re-examine their ministries. He shares what happened in the following testimony which underlines an important lesson for us all.

Just before Christmas 1980 I spent an evening praying over my ministry to discover what my spiritual gifts were and what the Lord wanted me to do in the future. I approached this with some fear because although Tony had assured us that the Lord would speak to us, there was that lingering question, 'What if He doesn't?' — but I need not have worried.

As I gave myself to Him in prayer and meditation, and as I gave to Him the ministries I was currently exercising, He began to show me quite clearly three particular spiritual gifts, two mentioned in the various New Testament lists of gifts and one not. He showed my gifts to be Teaching, Music and Administration. I also felt that they went in that order. I felt that the teaching was to be less preaching and more the sort of work I had been doing in leading the discipleship group. Musically I had already been challenged by one or two people in the Church to use the vocal ability that God had given me in His service. The administration I tended rather to dismiss as probably being nothing more than what I was already doing — planning the Parish House Party — a supplementary gift if you like.

How wrong one can be! I had not seen completely clearly what the Lord had been saying to me. I was reluctant to change. I was reluctant to lay down the ministries I had up until then been exercising. But the Lord was to change that. One of the dangers in doing this sort of exercise is that one gets stuck with one's own ideas and they can carry you off on the wrong track — as they could have done with me. So the next step was to have all this confirmed by the Leaders' Fellowship.

Reluctance to change

Tony and Patricia had, prior to the Fellowship meeting, been praying for each member of the group and Tony felt that he had to see me beforehand to talk over what he believed the Lord was saying about my ministries. I had also been struggling, still reluctant to change quite so dramatically, but was beginning to think that my emphasis on my gifts was wrong. Tony said that he felt the Lord was pointing out that Administration was my main gift and that my public ministry of preaching (and leading worship) was to become much less (just the odd occasion when the need arose.) He hadn't considered music, but since confirmed that to me. At that point I knew that he was right and was able to come to terms with the fact that the Lord was about to change completely the main ministries I was to exercise.

I was now able to go to the Leaders' Fellowship completely at peace and full of expectation. At these meetings we discussed in love each member's gifts and ministries, before Tony and Patricia added their feelings and before the member himself spoke.

One member started the ball rolling by saying that he was going to be very radical and suggest that my main gift was administration! Others agreed and also threw in the suggestion of music — I was almost chuckling by this time!

The Lord made it very clear to me, as we entered this new phase of life in the fellowship, that my work was to be very different. Just how the Administration and the Music were going to work themselves out remained to be seen. But I had no doubts that this was the way forward for me, and I found the prospect very exciting.

The reason for change

Why should the Lord want to change so drastically a ministry I feel sure was previously a correct one for me? I don't know that I can fully answer that. I believe that the preaching ministry we needed in the Church was different from the one I was exercising — I believe we needed very much a prophetic ministry and we began to see that. But above all I believe that the Lord wanted to move me on to new experiences. It didn't mean any form of demotion. Administration is as much a Spiritual gift as teaching and preaching — and that's a lesson perhaps all of us need to learn.

Each one needs to examine our gifts and ministries. For some there may be no change, for some there may be a slight re-direction, for others there may be a radical change, as in my case. Whatever it is we must be open to the Lord's guiding — to be exercising the wrong ministries after He has pointed out the right one is the sin of disobedience and

our ministry will never prosper. But to be working in accordance with His will, will bring His blessing and He will lead us forward.

(6) Housegroups

Some clergy are afraid of having housegroups unless they lead the meetings themselves. They are afraid of losing direct control of the teaching and events in the groups or of the groups becoming inward looking and divisive. These fears are not without some justification but the answer is to take the calculated risk of delegating to trustworthy housegroup leaders whilst maintaining close communication with them and structuring the housegroup system so as to discourage inward looking attitudes.

Others regard housegroups as a sort of charismatic status symbol or a cure-all which will automatically cause phenomenal church growth. Such a superficial attitude is doomed to disappointment. A truly effective system of housegroups must grow naturally out of the spiritual development of the church. So there is a right time for it to start which must be prayerfully discerned. There is nothing to stop the church having informal fellowship groups before a highly developed housegroup system is possible. We had such informal groups for some eight years before we set up our present comprehensive and effective system. But I'm convinced it need not take so long in other churches.

Christians need the home or cell fellowship just as the very early church met in one another's homes. They also, of course, need to be involved regularly in a congregation and occasionally in a large celebration. Some fellowship and ministry needs can only really be satisfied in the context of a small group.

It is essential to have good leaders. They don't have to have been Christians for many years. In fact our experience is that some less experienced Christians actually make better leaders, being more open to the Spirit and flexible in his hands. But they must be people the overall church leaders can trust. Equally it is vital that the trust is reciprocated. Never appoint a leader where there is any doubt concerning this mutual trust. I have on occasions dismissed my reservations about a potential leader as "just a feeling". And I have lived to regret it. It is very painful to remove someone from leadership.

Common vision

Another qualification to look for in a potential leader is that he is totally in harmony with the vision of the church. Otherwise he will be at best unable to lead the group in commitment to that vision. At worst he will become divisive. In 1981, at the request of a leader, I committed to paper what I understood as "Our Vision of the Nature and Mission of the Local Church". This was then approved by the PCC. Subsequently I produced a course of Bible Studies expounding this vision. Along with studies on Basic Christian Beliefs and Practice it now forms our Commitment Course. Before anyone joins a housegroup we take them through the Commitment Course for about six months.

Consequently not only housegroup leaders but housegroup members have a united vision which prevents divisiveness. We do have a general leadership training course (our annual Church Leadership Weekend) and a specific housegroup leadership training course. But the best training is as an assistant leader in a group. The leaders meet with the elders in the monthly plenary session of the Leaders' Fellowship and one elder also meets them bi-monthly in smaller groups. These meetings are for prayer, fellowship and communication. Each group is asked to give a brief written monthly report to the elders about how it is going in its fellowship, intercession and outreach. The report also includes any needs or difficulties in the group; any testimonies which can be shared with the church and any suggestions.

Leadership team

Each of our eleven housegroups has a leadership team: a leader; a teacher; a pastor who encourages care for the members and for local people outside the group; an evangelist who encourages group evangelism; an intercessor who leads the monthly intercession evenings; an administrator and a social organiser. The leader may also be the teacher but this is not always the case. We feel it is important for the elders to oversee which group a new member joins. This means we can keep a check on the numbers in the groups and on the balance between sexes and age groups, etc. However if anyone has real difficulty with what we decide we seek to be flexible. The groups are responsible for prayerfully discerning the spiritual gifts of new members and for conveying this information to the elders.

Each group meets weekly and spends two evenings a month in teaching and fellowship. This is often related to the Scripture Union "Learning All Together" material which we use in the Sunday services and the Young Church. Occasionally we run special courses or we may ask the groups to consider a particular subject which is important to the church's development. Sometimes we bring them all together for a plenary teaching session. Originally we asked each group to have two evenings of intercession each month. This was in order to train them to intercede. Now nearly all the housegroup members attend one of the nineteen prayer cells so the housegroups normally have a monthly intercession evening. This time is for prayer needs outside the group. They pray for one another's needs on other occasions, e.g. as part of a normal fellowship evening. Once a month there is an outreach evening for praying about or engaging in evangelism.

Each group opens one of its meetings every month and invites non-members (both Christian and non-Christian). This is not evangelistic in content, it is a normal fellowship evening. But it is meant to be pre-evangelism as well as to draw in Christians who are not yet housegroup members, including teenagers.

Caring and sharing

Caring fellowship is vital in the group's programme. Members share with one another and pray for each other. There is counselling at various levels, with the backing of the church's prayer counselling department if necessary. Members share practically and ensure no one is left in real financial need. Social events are arranged and these are another opportunity to invite non-members and non-Christians.

It is impossible for our housegroups to be too inward looking. Each group has its own mini-parish, a clearly defined area of the parish. Members do evangelistic visiting and literature distribution as often as possible. They look out for opportunities to care for parishioners outside the congregation who are in need. This care takes many forms - visiting, providing transport, etc. Normally each month one housegroup plans and leads a special morning service. Within the liturgical framework they will include spontaneous worship, testimony, drama and movement. Normally the leader preaches and often includes an invitation for people to come to the Communion Rail for prayer for healing; to commit their lives to Christ, etc. I have found it very moving to see sometimes a greater response than has happened when I have been ministering myself.

The groups also cover the practical jobs in the church on a rota system. These include cleaning and care of buildings; grounds maintenance, refreshments, creche, flowers, social events etc. This means that everyone joins in these jobs from time to time rather than leaving them to an overworked minority.

Other groups and teaching

Not everyone who attends the church wants to have the heavy commitment involved in housegroup membership. So we do have two weekly groups - one morning, one evening - which provide fellowship and Bible Study without the considerable responsibilities given to the housegroups. In addition we are developing a system of teaching course groups. These provide courses in Christian Doctrine, Apologetics (Defence of the Faith), Christian Family Life, Bible Content, etc. The aim of the system of groups in the parish is to provide a balance between experience of the Spirit and obedience to the Word and between care for the insider and ministry to the non-member.

We are an ordinary group of Christians. There are no super-stars in Hawkwell. But the Lord has led us to function increasingly as a body - a local manifestation of the Body of Christ. It is second nature for us to act corporately in pastoring, intercession, parish evangelism and outreach to the wider church. Not that we can't function on our own, but we sense that God has called us to witness to the possibility of an ordinary congregation increasingly functioning as the Body of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and in obedience to Scripture. What the Lord has done in and through us he can certainly do anywhere.

(7) Evangelism and Mission

A bishop once encouraged a group of ordinands, the night before their ordination by saying, "Remember you've been trained for a ministry which no longer exists." Perhaps this is a rather negative view of the relevance of theological training. It's a fact though that after five years' training in two leading evangelical colleges and two curacies I really had little clue as to how to do personal evangelism. Desperate for help, I overcame my prejudice about pre-packed instant success techniques from the United States and attended an Evangelism Explosion "clinic" in 1976. I learned more about presenting the Gospel to individuals in those five days than I had in five years at theological college.

I rushed back to the parish and formed an evangelism team with my wife and my curate. The first evening we visited a woman who started attending Emmanuel regularly. The following week a young married couple professed new faith in Christ. By the end of 1976 twenty-four people had professed faith in Christ, and soon many churchmembers were involved in the evangelism programme. We realised the morning services must be made more helpful to newcomers and their families. After a few years we felt it right to discontinue the programme as such although we used the teaching material to educate churchmembers in the content of the Gospel and in witnessing.

For some years we have held regular evangelistic Guest Services. Initially we felt we needed to tone down the more exuberant worship for the benefit of guests. We soon realised that this was false and unnecessary, although we are sensitive to their needs. We ensure they understand what is going on and that they can express themselves as they wish rather than feeling pressurised to clap or raise their hands. Often newcomers have been somewhat surprised by the worship. But normally they have wanted to return, having been impressed with the life, love and sincerity they have seen. A couple very recently converted testified to this being a main factor.

On one occasion, which was not a Guest Service, the couple leading spontaneous worship at the beginning of a morning service handed over to me. But I felt the worship was so anointed by the Spirit that I would not proceed with the liturgy or other items immediately. Instead we continued to worship spontaneously.

Eventually I asked if anyone was willing to indicate if they had received healing, or had made a commitment to Christ. People responded on both counts. God had worked simply through sung worship. There had, at that point, been no formal ministry of the Word.

Healing and evangelism

More recently we have made greater use of the Gifts of the Spirit in evangelism. I don't like a theatrical approach to healing but, when many turn for healing to mediums, I believe the church should make public the availability of healing through Christ. And this can have a definite evangelistic effect as can other Gifts of the Spirit. At this year's Pentecost morning Guest Service we had a drama depicting people with pain and heartaches which led into several short testimonies to Christ's healing power. Following a drama presentation concerning receiving a free gift we allowed time for words of knowledge. Several were manifested concerning physical ailments including someone with curvature of the spine and concerning emotional needs, including someone who had lost a child. Both of these proved to be visitors and they and others received healing. One person made a commitment to Christ and others were helped forward in this direction, including a lady who later admitted that a quite specific word of knowledge about fear had applied to her.

Often we find people need further help and discussion before making a definite commitment to Christ. So a couple of members run a Faith Sharing Group in their own home. This is a very informal gathering to which anyone wanting to know more about the Faith can go. They may or may not call themselves Christians. They may have problems, questions and fears about Christianity. Sensitively and without pressure these are dealt with over a cup of coffee. People can go as often as they like and normally would attend several meetings.

The group is also helpful for immediate follow-up of the newly converted or for clarifying the faith of those who made a profession of faith, say, in a Guest Service. The presence of the newly converted can be a great help to those still enquiring. A good number have come to Christ through the Faith Sharing Group.

The housegroups are active in evangelism. They pray for their neighbours; watch out for new arrivals; contact neighbours who visit church; distribute leaflets and invitations. They visit families who have been bereaved or who request Baptism or who are in special need. Once a month they have an open evening - a normal meeting to which anyone including non-Christians can come. They will also hold evangelistic evenings when a talk and discussion, an evangelistic film or video, or a book party can take place. At present the groups are having further training in evangelism and are visiting homes using a survey which is part sociological and part evangelistic. We are also developing a form of visiting which aims to visit an interested person several times. We felt the old Evangelism Explosion approach was too concentrated in a single visit.

In shopping centres and newspapers

In addition to all this we have done street evangelism in shopping centres and at a school fete. Using guitars, electric piano and tambourines we sang praise and worship songs. Drama was also used as were testimonies, comments and literature. Perhaps the most effective aspect was the expression of joy and life in the praise and light hearted dramas

which had a serious message. Also we once bought a page in the local free newspaper and published testimonies about conversion and healing with suitable photos. At present we are concentrating upon our links with local society - councils, clubs, charities and social service organisations.

On the wider front we found for years that our concern for mission in this country and overseas was rather ineffective. We often seemed to support missions out of a sense of duty. Then in 1982 God spoke to us with quite remarkable clarity about Acts 1:8 "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." We realised that God was telling us that as a local church we were to have direct personal involvement not only in our "Jerusalem" (Hawkwell) but in our "Judea" (Essex), "Samaria" (UK) and "the ends of the earth". No disrespect to missionary societies - we still support some - but our priority was to go ourselves and to link with the church in these various places. Initially we found this vision mind-boggling.

God also stressed that verse literally to us - that we were to be linked with the church in Israel. Unbelievable though it would have seemed then we now have had contact with churches in various parts of the world, including Israel, Sarawak, Switzerland and South Africa who have asked for literature and advice. We are beginning to see ministers and clergy (some from overseas) coming to Hawkwell for a week or so, seeing how our ordinary congregation functions as the Body of Christ and sharing in what God is doing here.

Church Leadership Weekends

God has also given us links with churches in different parts of this country. By early 1985 we had invitations from clergy, ministers and churches in Essex and seven other counties asking for help and encouragement.

We take out teams from Hawkwell for Renewal meetings and Church Weekends. Sometimes it is right to maintain a longer term contact for mutual encouragement. In 1984 we held our first annual Church Leadership Weekend in Hawkwell. Over 120 leaders attended from many parts of the country, staying with our churchmembers. We held sessions on Qualities of Leadership; Structuring the Church Charismatically; True Unity; Evangelism; Prophetic Ministry and Spiritual Warfare.

In April 1986 we plan to hold our first "Church Leadership Week" for clergy, ministers and elders who have received the teaching of the Church Leadership Weekend. This will combine an opportunity to see what God is doing here with practical workshops about how to move our churches on in Renewal and Restoration to biblical principles.

In 1984 we also sensed a definite call from God to take a stand against the confusion in beliefs and morals in the Church of England. We wrote to all 11,000 clergy in England about this and set up Action for Biblical Witness (ABWON). By mid 1985 over 1500 people, mainly clergy, were on the mailing list, including some from overseas. We want to call all Christians to greater openness and obedience to God's Word and God's Spirit. I presented a 20,000 name petition to the Archbishop of Canterbury asking for orthodox bishops to be appointed in future. The Archbishop gave me an hour's interview to discuss ABWON's concerns. These and other ABWON actions gained national publicity in the press, radio and TV. God has renewed prophecy in the church not only for the comfort of individuals and congregations but also that we may "expose the fruitless deeds of darkness" (Eph.5:11) and counteract them by proclaiming biblical truth in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. This ministry goes hand in hand with the more positive work of evangelism.

(8) Pastoral care and counselling

"We were met with so much love from everyone. Jesus said, 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). This would be the verse of Scripture that I would use to describe Emmanuel." So wrote a theological student who spent a month in the parish recently. Ironically the letter arrived four days before a parish day of prayer in which the Lord told us clearly how unloving we were! No contradiction — God has done a lot, but there is a lot more to be done.

The love of a congregation must constantly reach out to newcomers and those outside the church. But a priority is to ensure the church members are themselves cared for. If the troops are not cared for they will be ineffective in the battle to win new disciples. Working, as we do, on the principle of delegation we encourage each person to care for a small, manageable number of others. So the elders and their wives care for each other, although a good deal of care for

us comes from the other leaders and the congregation. For example my wife and I are under the pastoral care of one of the housegroups. We do not normally attend the group but the members often show their love to us in tangible ways.

Caring for leaders

Each month I guide a meeting of the Leaders' Fellowship which includes the principal members of the PCC; the housegroup and departmental leaders etc. With spouses this means 47 people. Here leaders can share any needs or problems to do with their ministry and, where suitable, any personal needs for prayer. Also our full-time administrator/elder, meets with small groups of leaders every few weeks for more personal care and communication. Needless to say any private, individual help a leader requires is a priority for the eldership. *Sometimes clergy concentrate too much on very needy parishioners and rather neglect their leaders.* This is contrary to the method of Jesus who majored on caring for the Twelve and sometimes the Three — Peter, James and John. We feel that if we care for the leaders they will effectively care for the members.

The church members are cared for primarily in the housegroups. They meet weekly and know they are responsible for each other. A lot of caring goes on that the elders have no knowledge of. But one thing is clear, the church members are cared for far more effectively than if the full-time staff were trying to pastor them all directly. Over the years members have become accustomed to seeking help from their housegroup leader, rather than rushing to the elders, although both member and leader can call on the elders if necessary.

On rare occasions someone may contact the elders about a matter that could easily, even better, be dealt with by the housegroup. A traditional sense of responsibility dies hard in me and I don't find it easy gently to suggest the leader is the right person to help. Done sensitively this has not led to any hurts or disappointments. Rather it has strengthened the pattern of delegation, helped mature the leaders, and ensured a high level of care in the church. Any difficulty I have to overcome in not being the traditional rector to whom every little problem is brought for instant, infallible solution is a small price to pay for this! I'm encouraged that even Moses had to learn this lesson (Exodus 18:13-26).

Looking after parishioners

If the care stopped there we could, as Canon Harry Sutton put it, "die of koinonia (fellowship)". How dreadful it is when charismatic churches become inward looking! It is sheer selfishness. On the basis of the delegated care the church members are in a strong position to look after parishioners outside the church.

Each housegroup has a clearly defined mini-parish around it. The elders pass on some information directly to the group leaders — e.g. a parishioner who visits the church and should be followed up, or a parishioner in need. Most information however is passed through the parish pastoral secretary. We give her, on specially designed forms, information about families requesting Baptism; wedding couples moving into the parish, and the bereaved who need long-term follow up. She then ensures the relevant housegroup fulfils this responsibility. In addition we are impressed with the groups' knowledge of their areas, gained through door to door visiting, etc. Through this they do, of course, discover opportunities for pastoral care themselves. Sometimes the groups co-operate to meet a special need. For example, they arranged between them a rota to take an elderly lady (not a church member) to visit her husband in hospital for a few weeks. This was co-ordinated by the pastoral secretary.

As I have made clear the groups can, when necessary, call on the leaders and the full resources of the church. For example the PCC has a Care & Share Fund administered confidentially by the elders and standing committee to help members in genuine financial need. Another vitally important way in which the church backs the groups is through the Prayer Counselling Department.

My wife and I moved quite naturally into prayer for inner (emotional) healing and for deliverance soon after we experienced Renewal. We learnt by experience as God led us fairly deeply into the ministry and we saw some remarkable results:- people being healed from childhood traumas which had crippled them emotionally in some way all their life; people being delivered from occult oppression or bondage to lifelong bad habit patterns. However, in my early years in Hawkwell I mistakenly spent many hours counselling one or two people who basically did not want to be set free from their problems. Rather they enjoyed the attention the problems gained them.

Delegating ministry

Eventually as explained in a previous article God made it clear he wanted this ministry delegated. Since then a Prayer Counselling Department in the parish has been very effectively led by Daphne Upton. The Lord has given her a

powerful and very discerning ministry and she has been used to help clergy and Christian leaders from elsewhere as well as church members.

Like any other ministry there can be unbalanced attitudes in the ministry of counselling. It should never be seen as a substitute for repentance, belief in the promises of God's Word and obedience to the Lord. Some people need these things rather than counselling. Nevertheless many people, including myself, can testify to the power God releases through counselling. I was healed and delivered from a deep, life-long insecurity which created strong fears in me and to some degree hindered my ministry.

So in addition to stressing the priorities of repentance, faith, and obedience we also encourage all our leaders to be counselled. Sometimes this happens in the parish, sometimes through Wholeness Through Christ schools. The leaders have clearly grown in maturity and strength through receiving this ministry and it enables them to counsel others, especially their group members. Experienced counsellors, such as Daphne, involve a less experienced one in counselling appointments (with the counsellee's agreement). This second person acts as a pastoral assistant giving prayer backing to the main counsellor and then doing the pastoral follow-up from the counselling. I produced some simple leaflets to help people go on from counselling. The counselling can have profound immediate effects, but often a person needs a fair amount of follow-up to "walk out" his healing e.g. to substitute good thought and habit patterns for bad ones. By being involved as pastoral assistant the less experienced counsellor is given on-the-job training. Incidentally we have a strict rule that no one, including myself, counsels somebody of the opposite sex on a one to one basis. We know of both clergy and lay folk (elsewhere) who have fallen into adultery through such counselling.

Discouraging introspection

Although we believe strongly in the relevance of this ministry we do not want to encourage an unhealthy introspection either in the individual or in the church. It is possible for the church to provide enough counselling "needs" to keep the counsellors busy. But this is a snare. Introspection encourages the creation of such "needs". Some people simply need to become outward looking in caring for others and in evangelism. If they do this their personal "problems" will dissolve or be dealt with incidentally. Beware chronic counsellees!

It is important to stress that we are not playing at amateur psychotherapy. Rather we are using prayer and the Gifts of the Spirit. Sometimes people involved in counselling elsewhere have lapsed into psychological manipulation with bizarre results. Rumours about this have discouraged some Christians from seeking genuine counselling which is a wholesome and gentle ministry. We believe Jesus ministers to the whole man and prayer counselling is part of that ministry.

STEP BY STEP THROUGH THE HURT

Daphne Upton leads the Prayer Counselling Department at Emmanuel, Hawkwell. She is able to help others meet Jesus the Healer, because she had to meet Him herself before she could take her place in the ministry team.

All through my life I have been dogged by the hurts of rejection. A rejection which made me insecure, leading to not trusting people. Rejection by being unloved and so unable to show love. Seldom praised, which created an intellectual inferiority complex. Defensive, which formed a bad habit pattern of temper. When I was 3½ years old, my mother died — I cannot ever remember being sat on my mother's lap and being cuddled and loved. Upon my mother's death my father was a hurt lonely man seeking companionship in the Public House at nights, while I was left alone at home — a very frightened and lonely child. I sought comfort by sitting on the front doorstep watching people pass by. For this I was beaten.

I lived away from home during the War. In 6 years I lived in 10 different homes — this made me very insecure. Many times I was made to feel second rate and an intruder and reduced to the status of a servant girl. I think of one home where I did feel secure and wanted, only to have the joy of achieving my 11+ exam taken away by the negative comment that it couldn't have been my maths that got me through — no praise, only the deep feeling of rejection and inferiority. I think of the teacher who constantly implied that because maths was my weak subject I was a failure in everything. Also there was the woman who used me as her servant and when I didn't meet her expectations, severely criticised me. From that moment I made a decision never ever to let anyone walk on me again — I built up a defence like a wall around me in the form of a temper.

By this time my father had remarried. How glad I was, now I was like other children with a Mum and Dad — and so I returned home. This time I experienced a rejection which was far worse than any other. I arrived to find a whole new family — mother, father and a baby and no room for me. The rejection was worse because here was where I ought to have found love and there was none for me. So into teenage years, all the traumas of childhood pushed deeper down inside. I had learnt to put on masks, to pretend. It was like a pond, the surface reasonably quiet but beneath it was sludge fermenting, poisoning everything — so into adulthood.

Daughter of the King

Early in 1980 I had to admit that I was not living the life God had given me in the freedom He intended. I went to Tony and Patricia to receive counselling for inner healing. They listened and brought me to the place where I could receive prayer for healing. I remember Patricia praying step by step through the areas of hurt. I remember at the same time hearing the Lord's voice saying He is not bound by time — my past, present and future are as one to Him — and so Jesus the Healer took my hand. He was there with me at my mother's death putting His loving arms around *me*, giving me all the love and understanding that a 3½ year old needed. He was with me in those nights when I was alone. It was as if He was putting out His Hand warding off the blows from the beatings I received. Jesus shared my joy of achievement in passing my exams. At the same time He showed me why this lady reacted as she did — there was a deep sadness in her heart. Jesus showed me I no longer need feel intellectually a failure, He made me as I am and loves me.

(9) Eldership

My main advice about appointing elders is 'Don't . . . until you're sure it is right!' Eldership can be a charismatic bandwagon; a status symbol to show how radical and biblical we are. All too often I come across churches who are appointing elders prematurely, using the wrong people. At best this results in a superficial eldership. At worst it is a sophisticated way of slowing the church down. Once a man is appointed it is very painful to remove him from office.

For years I taught our congregation the importance of corporate leadership and how Paul appointed elders (plural) in every church. The Lord himself didn't send his disciples out alone but in pairs. As we moved into greater freedom and deeper spiritual warfare I stressed how we needed a body of elders to protect the church under God. But not until I had been in the parish for over five years did I put to the PCC a definite proposal concerning the appointment of elders.

In October 1980 we arranged an open PCC meeting at which I taught at length the principles concerning eldership in the New Testament. Clearly the church was ready to accept this development. So we began to plan the procedure in consultation with the bishop who wanted the elders to be appointed on my authority rather than with his direct involvement. The PCC approved detailed Terms of Reference for the eldership and for various Church Departments (now Housegroups Department which includes Pastoral Care, Social Events and all the practical jobs within the church; Young Church Department and Outreach Department covering local evangelism, national outreach and overseas mission). The relationships between all these and the PCC and Standing Committee were carefully worked out in detail on paper and have never caused any tension.

We agreed that the clergy should share their oversight and leadership of the congregation with a small group of spiritually mature elders who have a united vision for the church and would be committed to pray together regularly. The elders would seek to discern what God is saying to the church, to communicate this and to take a lead in working it out within the fellowship, and in maintaining unity of fellowship and action. They were to be responsible for seeing that the gifts and ministries including those of Ephesians 4 were benefiting the church, and that biblical doctrine and behaviour were safeguarded. They would assist in worship; appoint and care for the departmental leaders and seek to relate fruitfully to the wider church.

Guidelines for congregation

Then I produced a sheet of guidelines for the congregation. This included a simple check list of the qualities required in elders in the Pastoral Epistles. I have since learned the importance of mutual trust in eldership. It is important not to appoint to eldership a man whom you cannot fully trust and relax with, knowing he also trusts you. This trust will be greatly tested and strengthened in eldership. I asked the congregation prayerfully to nominate men from among the existing leadership who could be elders alongside the curate of the time and myself. Meanwhile on a quiet day I had prayerfully constructed my short list of suitable men. I had 'marked' them against the check list and placed them in order of priority. The PCC accepted that there would not be an election but that, taking note of the congregational nominations, I would appoint the elders. The congregation nominated the same men in the same order as on my short list!

So the elders were appointed, commissioned by me in church and began to meet at least weekly. For some time the great benefits of shared leadership were proved. When it is working properly it provides great enrichment, support and protection. But we learned some things the hard way. Firstly we spent too little time praying and too much time discussing — the two faults being, of course, intimately related. The lay elders and their wives had to face the psychological pressure of being regarded by the congregation as virtually in the category of clergy. Being used to this I did not appreciate just how much this would affect the couples concerned but they worked through it well.

Key leader

At one stage we felt that the elders, including the clergy, should be on a level. I had no personal hang-ups about this. But in the long run it became clear that this was an attractive theoretical notion which did not work out practically. In practice I believe there is always a presiding elder and this is the incumbent. He can still relate on a level with the other elders 99% of the time, being corrected, even rebuked by them. But there will rightly be times when, after all the consultation, he will, rather like an apostolic delegate, have to take a decisive lead. Interestingly church growth surveys show that growing churches always have such a key leader.

Three levels of unity

But the main traumas came through the considerable spiritual pressures which will be experienced by an eldership, involved as it is in a 'front line' ministry and spiritual warfare. Any weaknesses will soon come to the fore. There are three levels of unity: the 'polite' stage when all is nice, but superficial; the 'disastrous' stage when character weaknesses and sinful traits come to the fore threatening to break the relationships. But rightly handled this can lead on to real unity where people accept one another 'warts and all'. Sadly after a few years it became clear that one elder was not coping at all well with the spiritual demands. In the end I had to ask him to stand down — a painful decision. The personal and family pressures on another man proved so great at one stage that he suddenly decided to resign. The curate moved away to become an incumbent so that left two of us. But as we two had worked through to the third stage of unity the relationship has proved of immense benefit. Eventually this elder sensed a call to move into full time ministry in another parish.

During the life of the eldership we normally met with our wives who had most valuable prophetic insights. The elders met the rest of the full-time staff (two married couples and one single woman) weekly for pastoral care and communication. I lead a monthly fellowship of all our housegroup, prayer cell, young church, administrative and other leaders. One of the elders met the same people in small groups every fortnight. The lines of communication between the elders and the housegroups and prayer cells were very efficient. We could circulate a prayer request to the whole membership within an hour or so. If even a new member of a prayer cell believed the Lord is revealing something significant to him or her this would be conveyed to the elders and could affect church policy. So in a real sense everyone is involved in influencing the direction in which the church develops. There is no place for autocracy. The church has begun to function as a body.

Apostolic ministry

It seems to me that the nature and function of eldership will change according to the gifts and ministry of the incumbent. Each church needs the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching ministries. The incumbent will not have all these ministries although God may give him special grace whilst he is in the early, pioneering stage of building the church. We have found that, as the church develops, these leading ministries become more defined. Whatever the incumbent lacks is made up by others including fellow elders and leaders.

(Note: The Hawkwell eldership at that time consisted only of men, but in the 1990s women were in key leadership positions).

© Tony Higton: see conditions for copying on the [Home Page](#)