



Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service

Addresses from the Tenth Anniversary
Celebration

Held at the Methodist Central Hall
Westminster
1 September, 2006

Telling the Story

I have a story to tell. It has a beginning, although where that beginning is, is a matter of opinion. It has middle, but it does not have an end, for it is an ongoing story.

It is difficult to know exactly where and when the seeds that grew into the *Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service* were originally sown. Probably in several different places: in the offices of various denominations as they struggled with the problems of caring for ministers and their families. In terms of this pre-history I only know of the Baptist strand of the story and I will start there.

When CMCS came into being it was based on the **Baptist Union Scheme for the Pastoral Care of Ministers and their Spouses**. (Now there's a snappy title if ever there was one!)

The origin of the Baptist Scheme goes back to a meeting held 20 years ago at Bodey House, the Counselling Centre for the West Ham Central Mission. The meeting was attended by people with long experience of ministry and who were, therefore aware of the stresses of ministry. Also present were experts in counselling and psychotherapy. The main concern was the pressure ministry was putting onto ministers' marriages. A paper 'Manse Marriages' was submitted to the Ministry Office of the Baptist Union. It was agreed something needed to be done. But nothing was done; I guess because no one knew what to do.

A year later in 1987 the General Secretary of the BU approached the Baptist Union Health and Healing Group asking them to look into the problems that were facing ministers and their families. That issue appeared on the agenda of every executive meeting of the Health and Healing Group from there on. It became apparent to this group that the issues facing ministers and their families were not just the problems of marriage breakdown but much wider issues of stress; lack of boundaries between professional and private life; dealing with the transference feelings projected onto ministers and their families; the dealing with obstructive members while being seen to be loving and caring; emotional problems that had their origins in the past but that

were now affecting pastoral relationships; etc etc. The group identified the problem but struggled to find a solution.

In early 1990 the group came up with a geographically limited scheme that was described as a research project. It was a less than satisfactory response to the problems faced, but was probably thought to be as good as could be achieved under the circumstances.

For one person it was not good enough and he threw a stick of dynamite into the arena in the form of a very sharp letter. The person, whose name does not appear again in our story, but who was the catalyst for getting things moving, was the Revd Don Black, Head of the Department of Mission at the Baptist Union.

His letter, written on 6 June 1990, was to the Chair of the Health and Healing Group. I quote from part of the letter:

You will probably have gathered from my brief note that I was not altogether happy about the proposal and the way that it was being done.

Your Executive will be aware that there are many others who share a deep concern for the needs of ministers and their families in their personal life.

In your preliminary studies you will no doubt have read the report both from the Methodist and the Anglican 'ministry' departments where in the former it was discovered that breakdown of marriages in Methodist manses was a far higher percentage than the national average and that the latter was moving disturbingly in that direction.

Could I encourage you at a very early stage to get in touch with all Area Superintendents and/or Association Secretaries, and if not them at least the Secretary for Ministry?

Having said that I must add that of course you are perfectly free to set up any organisation you wish. No so called 'officer of the Union' could or should try to prevent you, but I would point out that more than most this kind of venture is built on trust. If trust is not established at a very early stage in the development, then it may be used and valued by some, but it will not spread its offer of service to all Baptist ministers, let alone to ministers in other denominations.

kindest regards sincerely, Don Black

Don's letter was not only a demand to get something done; it was also prophetic for he saw the ecumenical dimension that would be needed to deal with these issues. He also understood the need for trust.

His stick of dynamite did the trick, for on 20 July, only seven weeks later, a group calling itself the 'Ad Hoc Group on Counselling' met at Baptist House in the presence of two Area Superintendents and the Head of the Department of Ministry. At that meeting we begin to see emerging the basis of what was to become the Baptist Union Scheme.

Not that it was plain sailing. In fact several times it looked as if the group would flounder as they struggled with the issues and grappled with ideas that were new to church officers. How close should any counselling scheme be to the ministry of Area Superintendents? Should non-Baptist counsellors be used? These were real issues that had to be dealt with.

The group reached a low point in 1991 when it looked as if again nothing would come from the effort that had been diligently put in. But again something happened that changed the situation.

The BU appointed a new Head of the Department of Ministry - a man who not only knew ministry inside out, but also had been trained as a counsellor. Add to this the fact that he worked in the higher echelons of the denomination and we had all the ingredients to give substance to the planning that had gone on over the previous years. The man was Malcolm Goodspeed, and within a year of his arrival the Baptist Scheme was launched. That was 1992.

Looking back one can see that the BU scheme had many flaws. It was born within the Baptist structures and was therefore probably too closely linked to the Area Superintendents, who have authority over the ministers in their region. We had taken care to choose competent counsellors but the Area Advisors who were integral to the scheme were not chosen with as much care.

Probably the biggest weakness was that although the scheme's confidentiality was paramount and absolute, it was not always perceived to be so as Area Advisors were seen to be working too closely with Area Superintendents.

But it must be said that for all its flaws it was a ground breaking piece of work. We were sailing in uncharted waters and produced a scheme that was, at least, good enough.

About 18 months into the Baptist Scheme the Area Advisors were asked to comment on the functioning of the scheme. One wrote pointing out many of the weaknesses I have outlined, but none the less finished with these words: **‘This is really a suggestion – have you considered working with the Methodist Church – they seem to encounter similar problems, and I know the Chairman in this area is quite envious of your scheme, wishing he could have a similar back up service.’**

The good enough scheme became noticed by at least the Methodists, and it turned out, also by the United Reformed Church, the Free Church Federal Council and the Salvation Army. And they were interested enough to want to be part of it.

So it was, on 28 June 1995, the first meeting of the Steering Group of the **Free Church Ministerial Counselling Service** was held. Tony Noles (head of counselling at Bodey House, who had chaired the Baptist Steering Group) was appointed chair of this new group. Also present were Michael Diffey of the URC, Ann Leck representing the Methodist Church, who also held high office in Relate, and Lt Col Stephen Pallant representing the Salvation Army and the FCFC. Representing the Baptists alongside Tony Noles were Malcolm Goodspeed, Tom Brown and myself. Apologies were received from David Jeffery, also a Baptist.

Almost the first thing that happened at the meeting was Malcolm Goodspeed introducing to the group a member of the Baptist Union Ministry Staff, Ian Millgate. He would, we were told, act as administrator to the Steering Group, and deal with the day to day running of the service when it started. In my naivety I wondered, ‘did we really need a professional administrator?’. Malcolm obviously had a clearer idea of where we were going and how much work would be involved than I did. Ian was a godsend. From day one his methodical, careful work has kept the group not only on the straight and narrow, but functioning at a professional level. I don’t know how we would have managed in that first year without Ian, for between the first

meeting in June 1995 and the launch of the Service in September 1996 the Steering Group met seven times, each meeting costing the world another forest's worth of paper, all of it vital, with numerous sub-committees that Ian also serviced. He has served the scheme so well for 11 years and we are grateful to him and to Malcolm who appointed him.

Things moved apace in that first year. New representatives came onto the group. John Simmonds from the Methodists. David Staple and then Christine Pocock of the FCFC. Phil Packman was appointed by the Salvation Army when they became full members of the service, to be followed shortly after by Ray Bates. In early 1996 two URC representatives were appointed: Ruth Archer, a counsellor highly regarded by the URC and the Westminster Pastoral Foundation where she then worked, and Christine Craven, the URC's Secretary for Ministry.

Looking back I can see that it was a formidable team of people who were committed to getting a counselling service going and who had between them expertise in ministry, church government, administration, counselling and the administering of counselling organisations. It was in many ways a dream team.

There was a sharpness of thinking and real vision of where this might lead. At his first meeting John Simmonds questioned the title of the fledgling organisation, the **Free Church Ministerial Counselling Service**, pointing out that in this context the word 'Free' had an imprecise definition; and might its inclusion exclude other denominations becoming involved at a later stage. Again, what foresight. After 'a full discussion' as the minutes say, it was agreed that the new scheme should be called the 'Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service' with John emphasising that the definite article should **not** be in the title. So the baby had been conceived, named, but was yet to be born for there was still much work to be done.

The Area Advisors and the Counsellors from the old Baptist Scheme had their appointments concluded and were invited to re-apply as counsellors in the new service. Under the old scheme prospective counsellors had to fill in a form that was two sides of A4. The new form was eight sides of A4. But most of the counsellors did reapply.

In the year up to the launch 70 new counsellors were appointed, each being approved by two counselling consultants who were at that time Ann Leck, Ruth Archer, Tony Noles and myself.

The old scheme was linked to Baptist Areas and it was clear that this was impossible with an ecumenical scheme for Baptist Areas are not the same as URC synods are not the same as Methodist Districts are not the same as S.A. divisions. So instead, we introduced regions, based on major cities: 23 in total. But how would they be managed? Rather than advisors we introduced **Regional Liaison Organisers, (RLOs)** who were not counsellors (or if they were would not be allowed to counsel within the service) but who were empathic but not inquisitive; and competent but not officious. They would liaise between the client and the counsellor and the counsellor and the central administration of the service. We realised that these people would be vital to the smooth running of the service. They would be at the cutting edge. They were the first point of contact. Their empathy, confidence and competence would give hope to ministers and ministerial families making their initial request for help. We advertised and short listed the suitable candidates who were then invited to a conference in Birmingham in June 1996 where they were vetted, and trained for the task that was to be theirs. We chose well. Most of those original 23 are still with us ten years on and I cannot speak highly enough of the way they have carried out their duties. I often get counsellors say to me how impressed they are by the competence, the helpfulness and the caring of our RLOs. RLOs, without you I don't think we would be celebrating today.

There were many other things that were done in that first year up to the launch. A complaints procedure was written by David Jeffery, a retired GP who just happened to have been involved in the writing of the complaints procedure of the BMA. You see what talent we had. Happily we have never had to use our complaints procedure and I pray we never will. Finances were sorted, fees agreed, a launch date set. Ministers and their families were written to informing them of the new service. And we waited. It is extraordinary that it was only 14 months after that first meeting that CMCS was launched on 1 September, 1996. The launch was featured in the religious press, but apart from that it was a very quiet birth.

Strange to say, I have no recollection of that day. There were no hiccups, no major problems, no disasters. The new born baby just started breathing and living. I think that is down to the hard work that had been done in those previous 14 months.

And the rest as they say is history. Tony Noles retired from the Steering Group in 1997. We are grateful for Tony's tenacity in the early years that kept the vision of a counselling service alive. He was replaced as chair by Ann Leck who by this time had been honoured with an MBE for her work in Relate. Ann served as chair for 4 years and was then succeeded by Ruth Archer who also served for 4 years. Two new consultants have been appointed: Phil Packman, and Sue Clements-Jewery, a Baptist who had been a counsellor with us from the beginning. The high level of competence on the Steering Group has always been maintained with the denominations always sending their best people to represent them.

CMCS has grown apace since then. Along side the original four denominations, Baptist, Methodist, URC and Salvation Army, plus the smaller denominations represented by what was the Free Church Federal Council but is now the 'Free Churches Group of Churches Together in England' we have been joined by the Church of England's Diocese of Southwark as a full partner, with the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and BMS World Mission having affiliated body status. Alongside these the following smaller denomination have also used the service: the Congregational Federation, the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, the Independent Methodist Connexion, the Moravian Church, the Old Baptist Union and the New Testament Church of God.

We now have 268 counsellors on our register. Over the 10 years 1,460 clients have been seen over a total of 13,300 sessions. Each of those sessions plus the initial contact with the RLO is an expression of the gospel and a part of the building up of the church. We are in the business of enabling ministers and churches to do their work for the Kingdom of God

Each year we run four training days for counsellors in different parts of the country, some of which are led by outside trainers but two have

been led by Sue Clement-Jewery, a highly competent trainer in her own right. RLOs have continuing training and refresher courses so that all of us keep our skills honed.

I apologise if my story has been rather long but it is an important story to tell and even so I have only scratched the surface. I told the story of the early years of the Baptist scheme to emphasise just how difficult it was to find a way of caring for ministers and their families in a competent, confidential way. All the denominations had given hours of thought to the issues. When we came together 11 years ago it was as if all our separate thinking, agonising, praying were put in the same flask and there was a chemical reaction. And by the power of the Holy Spirit what we had all been searching for so long was created.

I apologise to the people I have not mentioned by name who have played an important part in the story. Maybe one day the history of the service needs to be written in full.

I finish with two quotes. The first from an Anglican Counsellor who said of CMCS: 'Its administration, documentation and communication are second to none. CMCS is the best counselling organisation of its kind.'

I said at the beginning of my account that our story has no end for it is on going. My second quote is from an Area Advisor from the old Baptist Scheme who said some 12 years ago: "I have ministers who approach me for help with their own church pastoral problems. Should we not be looking towards offering work supervision for our ministers? It might help to stop problems becoming a crisis." Well, maybe we should. Perhaps this will be the next chapter of our story.

Michael Bray
*Consultant to CMCS, 1996-
Chairperson of Steering Group, 2005-*

Sermon to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service

Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength

Wesley's Chapel is a Grade I listed building. Grade I inside as well as outside! I've always considered it to be a "sermon in stone". It stands there proclaiming its own particular message. And if the sermon were to have a text, I'm certain it would be the words of the two commandments of Jesus which are painted on the boards in the Apse of the Chapel. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength." And that commandment is matched by its counterpart: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

I take these words as an offer to build a balanced life around the two poles of loving God and loving our neighbour. But our love of God has to come from the whole of us, from our affective, psychological, intellectual and physical selves.

- ❖ Too much heart would produce sentimental religion;
- ❖ Too much soul would produce sanctimonious religion;
- ❖ Too much mind would contribute to something altogether too cerebral;
- ❖ Too much strength would yield muscular Christianity with all its drawbacks.

So we are to love God with a balance of all the energies we can produce. From the cognitive and the imaginative, the outer and the inner levels of our being.

And we are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. On the whole, the Christian Church has done "neighbour" well enough. In programmes of social care and outreach of infinite variety, the Church has brought commandment into practice. Yet, sometimes (often?), this serving the needs of the neighbour has been at the cost of "yourself".

Social, community/neighbourhood, outreach work has often been a convenient way of disguising or projecting or displacing or

transferring energy away from the need to deal with the self.

It doesn't take much wit to illustrate this point. We've all met carers who, when it comes to their turn to receive care, don't know how to do it. And who hasn't come across workaholics who, by their great activity, show a lack of readiness/ability to cope with stillness? And have we not all met those whose outward attitudes are scarcely matched by a readiness to contemplate inward realities?

I begin in this way deliberately. I'm full of admiration for the work of the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service. But it doesn't take much of an effort to praise it. Am I against breathing? Of course not. How can I be against the CMCS? It's so self-evidently needful and right. It's cheap and cost effective. It's simple to understand. It offers its services anonymously and is easy of access. Those who respond to expressions of need are professional and take care to keep their skills up-to-date. This is surely one of the Church's best kept secrets.

I want to offer my own three cheers for the Steering Group, the Regional Liaison Organisers and the hundreds of Counsellors scattered across the country. What's more, if I may (since his name appears in none of the annual reports), I want to raise a glass to Ian Millgate and the Baptist Union who've been the initiators, the lead agency, the motor and energy of this scheme for the whole of its history.

As we consider the fulfilling of the two commandments of Jesus as an expression of the truly balanced life, we don't have to try very hard to find those areas of church life which bring their own pressure to bear upon individuals and relationships seeking to fulfil those commandments. The annual reports make it clear that marital problems offer a very significant percentage of the problems presented by those who seek the help of CMCS. But there's a clear indication that work-related stress is another key area for producing problems. I can only hint at some of these in what follows.

(a) Consider the confusion of roles as we try to combine the duties of:

Professionalism & Vocation

Contractual Work & Flexible work hours;

Employment Law & Going to those who need us most.

And how does a Superintendent Minister (I speak as a Methodist) cope with the fact that at various times he/she needs to be to his/her colleagues, their boss, line manager, Pastor, mentor, confidant, friend, by turns?

- (b) Our ethos and systems seem to produce/attract control freaks, bullies, fanatics, (dangerously) harmed and hurting people who, in the service of the Church, can delude themselves that they're following the way of Christ when, in fact, they are acting out some of the suppressed emotions and experiences buried within them.

They are so often dealing in fact with hidden agendas, with things happening below the surface, with factors involving the projection of undisclosed (undisclosable) material.

- (c) If these pressures come from within the Institutional Church, there are other constraints that come from without. We live in times of social change and can often feel bewildered and overwhelmed by protocols that have evolved from other cultures and which create their own pressure. The secular world demands that we confront sexism and racism, the need for child protection, the facilities we offer disabled people, the way we treat those of diverse orientation, and the elderly who live amongst us.

And the Church must do its level best to address all these issues. Yet, in my experience, we discover from time to time various kinds of vulnerability:

- I. "The victim" – the child, woman, gay or lesbian person, the man or woman with a disability who has been discriminated against.
- II. "The needs of the perpetrator" – who may well be a church worker or someone at the very heart of the church congregation and who, when an incident is dealt with, continues to attend worship and to be involved in the life of the church
- III. Cases of "the falsely accused" in a Church seeking as much to be politically correct and to safeguard itself against the

possibility of litigation as ever it may be ready to protect the vulnerable.

I was glad to hear the reading from Brian Thorne's *Infinitely Beloved*. I noted the fact that, in his view, the work of a therapist is to help people "face their pain" and "increase their awareness of themselves and others". This work would boost self-confidence and a sense of self-worth. People could be helped to enjoy "the wonders of their own natures". Thorne goes on to declare: "My passionate trust [is] in the essential wonder of human nature and in the creative potential of humankind. [This] is undoubtedly affirmed and enhanced by my daily experience as a therapist".

I'd want to say with some emphasis that such feelings are equally engendered in me as a minister, feelings given to me by my daily experience in pastoral care. On an occasion like this, it's natural that we focus on the needs of those who've been pushed to the limits of their endurance. But we should never do this without recognising that the vast majority of relationships and lives that come within the aegis of the Christian Church are acted out in a positive manner. Christian churches are, indeed, full of those who love God with all they have and their neighbour as themselves.

So let's celebrate the existence of CMCS. But let's recognise that it's a safety-net for the 150-170 people per annum who seek its services. Let's honour the huge amount of work done through pastoral care and (the most old-fashioned virtue of them all) friendship to achieve the balance of the texts that adorn the Wesley's Chapel Apse.

In conclusion, on this tenth anniversary let me launch a bottle of Methodist de-alcoholised champagne against the prow of the CMCS vessel (the only kind of champagne worth wasting on such an act!) and wish it and all who sail in it a fruitful and a blessed second decade. Thank you for the work you do. God be with you in your continuing ventures.

Amen.

The Revd the Lord (Leslie) Griffiths
Superintendent Minister, Wesley's Chapel

Order of Worship

Gathering Song : Jubilate, everybody

Welcome from Minister of Westminster Central Hall

Hymn: Praise to the Lord

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Readings

Psalm 67

Prologue: Reluctant Prophet – from *Infinitely Beloved* by Brian Thorne (DLT 2003)

Mark 12:28-34

Telling the Story of CMCS

Hymn: Father in heaven

Sermon:

Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness

Prayers of hope and healing

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided

Blessing

Leader: Ms Ruth Archer

Guest Preacher: The Revd the Lord Griffiths

Organist: The Revd Roger Hutchings

Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service
PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot OX11 8RT

Tel. 01235 517705

Fax 01235 517750

E-mail: admin@cmcs.org.uk

Website: www.cmcs.org.uk