

Meeting of MCCN at Darlington

17th March 2009

Notes by [Ken Tait](#) – I didn't get the full names of some of the people who spoke.
Please let me know of any errors, omissions or misrepresentations

Over thirty people were present at the meeting which was held at Bondgate Methodist Church.

After opening devotions by the Rev Phil Clarke we were given *The Darlington Story* by Bob Robinson who is the district Administrator and PA to the chair the Revd Ruth Gee.

The Darlington Story

Bob described Darlington itself as a 'Quaker town' mentioning the particular influence of the [Pease](#) family during the nineteenth century who (among other things) were involved in the establishment of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

Recently the latest steam locomotive to be built in Britain, the *Tornado*, had its maiden run calling at Darlington. This was the outcome of a twenty year project, and indication of what can be achieved with passion and patience. Can we learn from this?

Darlington was a major railway town and when the demand for the skills developed in that industry were no longer needed they were adapted to the building of bridges. Bridges across the world have been built by firms based in Darlington

The District

The town of Darlington is placed at the centre of the [Darlington Methodist District](#). The district extends to Durham in the north, to Stockton and Middlesbrough in the east, into North Yorkshire in the south and the dales in the west. The area is a mix of rural, urban and industrial contexts.

There are eleven churches in the Darlington circuit all with different stories. Eastbourne after being on the verge of closing now has a refurbished sports hall that serves the young people of the area and a community outreach worker currently operating as a job-share. Pierrmont engages in outreach through a KidZone and a FamilyZone.

The town centre

Bondgate is the church in the town centre. The building was erected in 1812. Recently, it has converted its foyer into a café separated from the worship area by glass. Worshippers enter through the café, picking up their hymn books as they do so. In the worship area itself (which still has a gallery) the pews have been replaced by chairs and the organ has gone.

A once successful venture that had to be abandoned was Wesley's. A meeting

place for young people that attracted as many as 400 with its music and dancing. But the scene became a magnet for drug pushers which led to tension between the church and the project and its eventual closure. One consequence arising out of this experience has been a certain reluctance on the part of the Bondgate congregation to try anything new.



Nevertheless, not only has the café been created but a corridor on an upper floor has been converted into a flat. This flat is the home of their lay worker, Tom. Tom explained that the mark of his role is his large bunch of keys though he is not a caretaker. He looks after the building and the people who use it, building up relationships with them. And there are a large number of activities: the University of the Third Age, the Darlington Arts Academy, Alcoholics Anonymous are some of the organisations that meet on the premises.

The Revd Isobel Akers talked about a new venture, *The Ark*, which is a response to the present economic and financial turbulence, in particular the rise in unemployment. *The Ark* is a drop-in for those who have become unemployed and are seeking new employment. It's called *The Ark* because we are all in the same boat.



Malcolm spends one day a week as a volunteer retail chaplain. For the rest of the week he is a mortgage adviser. One day a week is enough to keep track of what is going on in the shops and stalls of the town centre. He sees himself as someone to talk to as he drops into the independent shops as well as those which are part of a national chain. He is learning to see things from different perspectives and to identify with other people especially with the uncertainty of jobs. He would like some recognition by the management and, for example, be invited into staff meetings.

Tees Valley Ministry

The Revd Rosa Leto gave an overview of the [Tees Valley Ministry](#) an ecumenical project now working under the umbrella of the Churches Regional Commission in the north east. The Tees Valley Ministry promotes chaplaincy in the area and

strives to be a good source of expertise and training in different models of chaplaincy, and to be a facilitator of activities grounded in the action plan of local churches.

Development

Malcolm, an architect working on religious buildings, spoke briefly about his work. In particular he mentioned that eight of the schemes with which he was concerned are now held up because of the current economic and financial climate

Urban Mission

[Erica Dunmow, the national Urban Mission Development Advisor](#), gave a short presentation that set out the preparation for the Jesus in the City Conference on [Community, Conflict and Celebration](#) (Belfast 2010) and the World Missionary Conference on [Witnessing to Christ Today](#) (Edinburgh 2010).

Discernment and Selection Coordinator

The Revd Howard Mellor is the recently appointed Discernment and Selection Coordinator. (There was a ripple of amusement when as he stood up to speak to us he glanced at the screen behind him before telling us his title.) Howard is head of the Discernment and Selection Unit of the Methodist Church The remit of this unit is described in a section taken from a document on the Methodist Church web site.

For the Connexional Team, and for other Methodist Employing Bodies, the Discernment & Selection Unit:

- provides a comprehensive selection / recruitment service and conclusion of employment / retirement service
- provides advice and support on issues of learning, training and development

For the wider Connexion, the Discernment & Selection Unit:

- manages the following processes in accordance with agreed policies:
 - District Chair nomination and selection
 - Experience Exchange Programme selection and deployment
 - Mission Partner selection and deployment
 - Presbyteral and diaconal candidating
 - Presbyteral and diaconal resignation and reinstatement
 - Presbyteral and diaconal retirement and early retirement
 - Presbyteral and diaconal stationing (including stationing to appointments not within the control of the Church, appointments open to the laity and to ordained ministers, permission to serve another Conference / church, permission to study, and permission to reside abroad)
 - Presbyteral and diaconal transfer and recognition
 - Presbyteral, diaconal and Mission Partner CRB checks
- designs, implements, maintains, reviews and develops Connexional strategies and processes to encourage and discern vocations to the ordained ministry

Howard mentioned a few particular issues:

- the soliciting and collating reflections on the process of candidating
- preparing for the next fifteen years
- looking at specialisation within ministry
- the reduction in the proportion of young candidates

MCCN Business

Constitution

A proposed constitution was presented to the meeting. With a few minor changes in wording the constitution as tabled was accepted on the understanding that it will be presented at the General Meeting of the Network to be held as part of the next MCCN Conference for formal adoption. A copy of the Constitution be viewed or downloaded from the MCCN website.

Finance

A brief report was presented by the Treasurer indicating a satisfactory situation. Mark made an appeal for more members to underpin their commitment by setting up a standing order for the payment of an annual subscription of £50, £75 or

£100.

Conference

The next MCCN Conference would take place from 17-19 November 2010 at the Hayes, Swanwick. The cost would be £130 per person with discounts (either £10 or £20) for early payment.

Publicity

MCCN will have a stall at the Methodist Conference in Wolverhampton and will take a page in the Conference Handbook to raise awareness of the Network. A short Powerpoint presentation or DVD will be made to run on the stall, and on other occasions. Photographs of activities and events that illustrate the work of MCCN members are required for this presentation. (Please send them to [Ken Tait](#))

A new publicity leaflet has been produced. Printed copies will be available at future meetings. Copies can be downloaded from the web site.

The economic and financial situation – the church's response

This session took the form of a presentation by Niall Cooper, the National Coordinator of [Church Action on Poverty](#) with an opportunity to discuss some of the issues. Here are some of the points Niall made.

- The main casualties of the present crisis will be those that are struggling already.
- In the coming year a further 600,000 to 1,000,000 people will lose their jobs
- half a million households will be in serious rent arrears
- 75,000 families will lose their homes because they cannot pay the mortgage
- There are 10 applicants for every job vacancy – this will rise to 20 (2½ times what it was 12 months ago)
- There is loss of dignity, loss of self worth, damage to health and family life, a framework of young people and children brought up in poverty
- The Pope has pointed out the gap between the waste of the superfluous and the lack of the necessary
- £13 billion was borrowed in London in 2007
- 4 out of 5 people own property
- sound attitudes to credit and debt have given way to a can-have-it-all-now attitude
- we have used property to fuel our life style
- nobody has the answers (to the present situation)
- as Christians we will be judged by our response to those who are suffering the consequences

- the struggle with poverty takes place behind closed doors
- people feel shame but responsibility is not theirs
- present recession is more egalitarian than that of 1980 – it is affecting men and women equally, north and south alike, professionals as well as others
- people who were earning £600 per week are now having to live on £60 per week
- Citizen's Advice Bureau are dealing with rocketing numbers of people
- the Christian response needs to be pastoral and prophetic
- leaders must be challenged – in our cities (not just the City)
- political priorities must address the needs of those suffering the most
- we can't wait for government to act
- we must mobilise the assets that are present in the community
- when money is tight then we must utilise personal and social assets – church groups and community groups come to the fore
- social solidarity