

Newsletter

No. 72—Michaelmas 2023

LENKER'S LETTER

The big change in the last few months has been the change of priest in our congregation in County Clare, Ireland. Ute König was given a worthy send off in Tuamgraney and also in Kikenny, where she has been visiting a group for the last few years. On 30th July, I was present for Siobhan Porter-Moora's Induction in County Clare. It was wonderful to experience a full chapel and the warmth of the welcome for Siobhan and her husband, Johannes.

This is a good moment to give an update on the life of The Christian Community in the Republic of Ireland. The house that we bought in 2017 has served us well, although the chapel space was always intended to be provisional. The large kitchen is the heart of the community, where countless meetings, conversations and meals haven shared. The house has space for a number of guests to stay, and there is a dedicated space for therapies, which we rent out.

A few years ago, a plot of land adjoining our garden came up for sale and we were able to purchase it with a loan from one of the German regions. Since then, we have been work-

ing with a local architect to develop a plan to build a dwelling space that could provide housing for people connected to our life and work. The idea is that some of the units would be rented, thus providing an income for the maintenance of the whole estate. Perhaps more importantly, we see a potential for creating a body of warmth and interest around the church. The next stage of the plan is to use the promise of income as part of what will fund the building of a dedicated church space behind the existing house.

You may notice that I have written about this as 'we'. This is not the lenkerly royal we, but it reflects the fact that the priest in Ireland is far away from other colleagues and it has felt important to offer my support when looking at this exciting development. As most meetings of the Development Group take place on Zoom, I have been able to stay in touch with developments and offer my support where possible.

Aaron Mirkin will take a six-month sabbatical in the USA and Mexico from September.

*With best wishes for a fruitful Michaelmas,
Tom Ravetz*

MANCHESTER

As it transpired, the last Act of Consecration in Manchester, held by Rev. Erhard Keller, on July 28th, was for Pauline Anderson, a member who died on June 28th 2023. In recent years the Service was held six to eight times a year in the community room of Didsbury Methodist Church, but this church has now closed, and the loss of that space made the little Christian Community group, which itself had also been dwindling, realise that it was time for them to cease their activities for the time being.

The record of the activities of The Christian Community in this large metropolis has had

its particular features and colouring. Apart from a brief interval in which there was a resident priest, it has always been a visited congregation. For many years it was visited from Sheffield by Rev. William Davie. The Services were held at St. Michaels in Spath Road, a large residence which housed three chapels, served by three different religious organisations, and a number of tenants. At the end of the 1970s the house was offered to The Christian Community, as it was the one group out of the three that was continuing to hold services there. Because of a licence (from the Charity Commissioners) which applied to the

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house—as a venue for public events—there was just one condition attached to the gift: in the event of the property being sold, the proceeds were to be used solely for the furtherance of the activities of the Community within Greater Manchester.

On inheriting the house great efforts were put into making a fresh start: Rev. Jon Madsen was asked to move there to test the potential for finding younger, interested people and to restore the property. The tender new life in the congregation provided a basis for them to continue being visited, now by Rev. George Klockner from Ilkeston, who maintained and motivated the northern triangle of congregations in Ilkeston, Sheffield and Manchester. St. Michaels, being rather unmanageable, was sold and the congregation moved to a more suitable house in Palatine Road, faithfully looked after by a local member. When she retired from that task, it became clear that we would no longer be able to look after our own property, and a new venue was eventually located at the Methodist church in Didsbury.

This last step came about following the decision of the group that the time had come for a thorough reassessment of their situation. They unanimously agreed that the Charity Commissioners be informed that they could no longer maintain a property for their use. An arrangement was agreed: if The Christian Community could assure the Commissioners that the group in Manchester would continue to be provided for by the priest in Ilkeston, the monies from the sale of the (Manchester) house could be transferred to The Christian Community Trustees in order to acquire new premises for a chapel and priest's accommodation necessary for a priest to continue to be resident there. Those visits (by Louise Madsen) continued until 2012 when it became the turn of the priests in Stourbridge to take on that role. The connection to Ilkeston was maintained through the fact that the Stourbridge priests also took over regular visits to Ilkeston.

Looking back over this eventful history, there were, indeed, many ups and downs. One element was constant: a wish to learn and understand. Revd Evelyn Capel gave many courses of lectures in Manchester over the years; she was evidently appreciated by many.

This lively interest continued in the gatherings that were held after the services, which provided much stimulus.

Bringing our activities to an end in a place where they have been carried on for so many years is always painful. However, it would be wrong to allow that sorrow to blind us to what has been achieved through all those years. Our work is not only, or indeed primarily, concerned with outer 'results'. Whenever we hold a service, accompany someone across the threshold, or provide help and healing in people's struggles in their destinies, we are planting seeds in human lives that will endure into future ages. For this reason, we can look back on what we were able to do in Manchester in thankfulness and openness for what in time may again want to unfold there.

Louise Madsen

RENEWAL OF OUR BUILDING IN DEVON

Thanks to the help of many individuals—here, from other congregations and through legacies via Central Funds—we have completed the renewal of our roof including pipes, gutters, chimneys and windows.

With the generous support of Gordon Clarke, who donated his time and expertise as project manager, this was well accompanied and we stayed within budget.

For five months we lived with the building clad in scaffolding with fortnightly meetings and daily conversations over coffee with the builders.

Now the local community is commenting on the new look of our place and we are carrying on the work in the garden and on the inside.

Our attention can focus on the life within our building once more and we also have more interest in hiring our rooms as well as enquiries into our services and activities.

We are offering our guestrooms as a unit and retreat space during the summer months for up to five guests staying several nights. Guided walks on Dartmoor or the South-West Coast Path can be arranged. Nearby Dartington Estate offers concerts as well as courses.

Thank you once more for being with us during this time of change and renewal,

*Sabine
and the Devon (Et Cornwall) Congregation*