

Celebration LINK

October 2010

The roots of our calling

In this issue we have chosen to feature the recent reunion, photos of which have filled both the centre pages. Some less intimately connected to the Community of Celebration may feel this is a bit of overkill, but it reflects the significance the Community has played and still does play in people's lives even decades after they may have left.

As we said in the last issue, reunion as such is not particularly important, although there is an element not necessarily obvious to the casual observer. When people leave, the circumstances at the time may well be difficult, leading to ambivalent feelings and even hostility in one or two cases. Yet the power of the life is such that, more often than not, it keeps people connected. Against this background reunion has a special role in laying to rest ancient issues and problems.

But for some there is another, deeper purpose: a desire to identify and reconnect with the real meaning of the life that we shared. We explored this through conversations, through formal sharing of our stories, through our worship, through the breaking of bread and the breaking open of the word.

How can we put words to it? Most people present had at least one thing in common: they were products of renewal in the church in the 1960s or 70s. This led them, sometimes intentionally and sometimes almost by accident, into community living; and even those who did not take that road were deeply inspired by the worship of

the Fisherfolk. That was the starting point of our collective journey, but the question was, how much of that early vision and spiritual energy remained today?

In one sense it all seemed like a long time ago. Most people have moved on and the intervening years have taken them in many different directions. For some there has been disappointment and even disillusionment. Yet amongst us, often expressed in inarticulate ways, there is still an abiding sense of call, traceable back to its origins nearly 40 years ago.

This 'call' is not a summons from God to live community life, even though many used to speak of it in those terms, including some of those who subsequently left. It goes deeper than that, rooted in what God was doing in our hearts in spiritual renewal. At the reunion we explored the difference between calling and preoccupation. The latter, even if God uses it mightily for the kingdom, is essentially temporary. Eventually we will move on. Calling, however, goes to the foundation of who we are. Calling is for life; indeed, for eternity.

Paradoxically, preoccupations can put us out of touch with our calling, particularly if we are comfortable in them and having fun. It matters little whether the activity in question is religious or not. Our true calling is hidden in the mystery of God, which sounds like mere religious phraseology until we realise that calling is about desire: the desire to know God and obey

him, and to understand his word as our own spiritual truth. God, however, is not easily or cheaply known.

Thirty or forty years ago baptism in the Spirit was, for many, an awakening. They may have had an established Christian faith and yet there was an awakening to a deeper reality of the Spirit than they had ever known or suspected. In a sense, community too was an awakening: an awakening to the spiritual nature of 'church' and the critical importance it has in enabling us to enter in to our true identity in Christ. This 'identity in Christ' is the goal of calling. We don't arrive when we are awakened to it; rather, we are consumed by the desire to become what we are called to be.

The structures we set up, and even the spiritual experiences we have if it comes to that, are like props: they help us get going on the road to fulfilment of our true calling. But human life being what it is, with renewal movements eventually the tide goes out and if our reliance is on them we are left high and dry. We are left with knowledge that cannot be *unknown* and yet has to be constantly renewed within our souls if it is to remain our truth. That is the problem with grace. We don't receive it and hold it forever. It has to be renewed by God daily.

Today, then, we have to pursue calling without the props that we once had. Another way to think of calling is to say that, just as Jesus was *the Word* made flesh, so each of us is a word

Reunion Day

More than 70 old community members from Yeldall, Cumbrae and Post Green, plus friends, met together for a day at St Dunstan's Church Lytchett Minster in September to catch up, share their stories and reflect on the life that made such a profound impression on their lives. These are some photos* from the day.

*Photos: Phil Bradshaw



Gathering in plenary



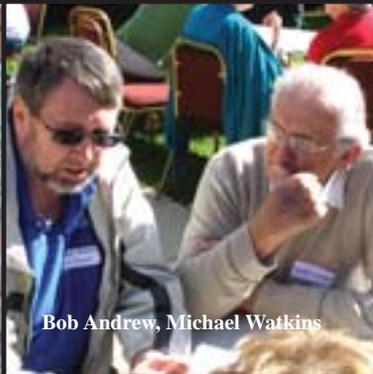
Communion



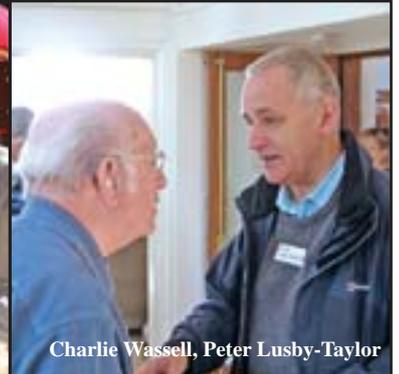
Bill Farra, Betty Pulkingham



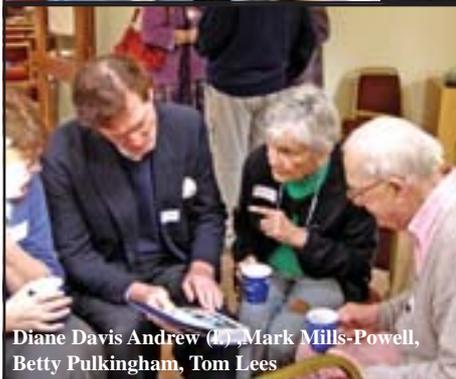
Mark Mills-Powell



Bob Andrew, Michael Watkins



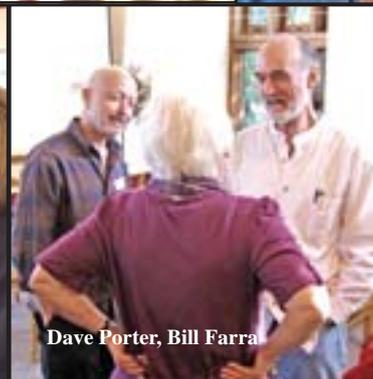
Charlie Wassell, Peter Lusby-Taylor



Diane Davis Andrew (L.), Mark Mills-Powell, Betty Pulkingham, Tom Lees



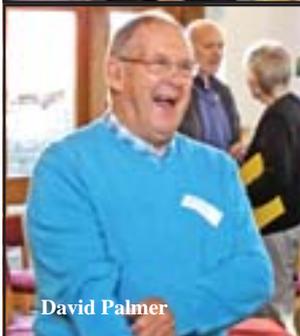
Dave Griffiths, Sylvia Wilkes



Dave Porter, Bill Farra



Alan Greening



David Palmer



Dave Porter, Ian Jolly, Dave Holland



Nan Robertson, May McKeown



Linda Palmer, Bridget Green



Howard Page-Clark, Nathan Pulkingham



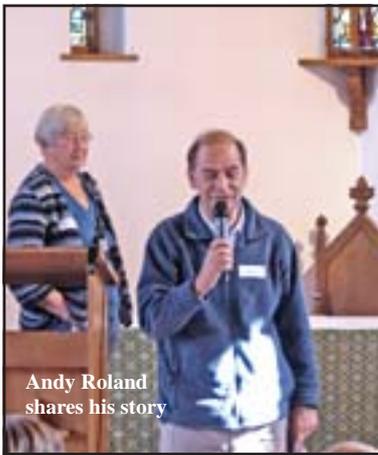
Diane Davis Andrew, Jodi Page-Clark



Debbie Thorpe, Dave Holland



Val Holland



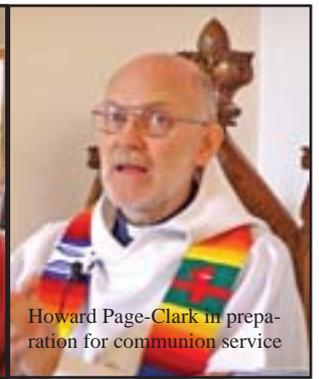
Andy Roland shares his story



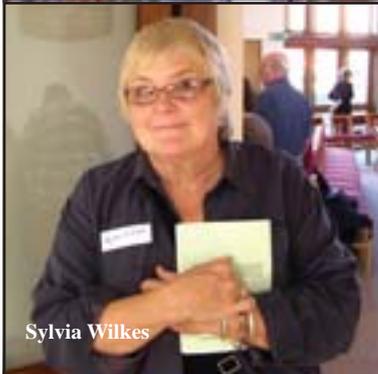
Margaret Bradshaw, Janet Barker, Viv Quick



Sue King, Daphne Mills Hope



Howard Page-Clark in preparation for communion service



Sylvia Wilkes



Rosemary and Desmond Orr share their story



Desmond and Rosemary Orr with Michael and Eileen Watkins
Foreground facing camera: Bob Andrew



Robert King, Marion Warren



Jeanne Hinton



Tom and Christine Lees



Daphne and John Hope share their story



Ken Ramsay, Betty Pulkingham, Valerie Ramsay



Ray Humby



Part of the steering group, who met over the weekend to organise the day



Shirley Cook, Christine Lees



Viv Quick

spoken by God in the flesh. That word must have a meaning, but rather than trying to seek a meaning given to us by God from the outside (e.g. 'go and live in community') our spiritual call is to create the meaning from within through our co-operation with God's grace, becoming his word spoken in the concrete circumstances of our lives.

The call has several dimensions. First, it means that we are called to love in freedom, i.e. not merely accepting the conventions provided for us by society and the church. Second, we are called to love authentically, accepting the reality of our fellow human beings without agendas, conditions and preconceptions. Third, we are called to accept God's will, not as revealed to us in blinding clarity, but precisely in its mystery. It is this latter element that tells us our true identity is 'hidden' in God.

It confronts us directly with our fear, because our lives generally depend on our ability to construct our own identity by controlling the circumstances around

us. For example, there are social conditions and conventions in both church and society which can enable us to fit in and be seen as acceptable. In fact, there are myriads of ways which provide us with the power to control how we are known and perceived – even by ourselves. To surrender this control to something inscrutable is terrifying, even if it is God.

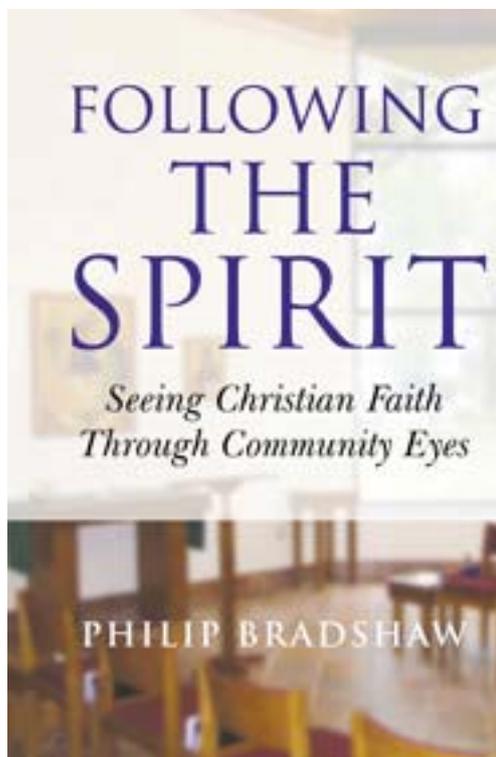
It is not just that God's will for us might be something outlandish, like selling all our possessions. It is that if we give up our ability to control our identity through the various means at our disposal, we ourselves might turn out to have no meaning. And indeed we don't, apart from God. Our calling is to discover our identity in him. So calling is about our desire for God, but that very desire, if it is genuine, confronts us with our deepest fears.

For some of us at least, community life was sacramental, a kind of icon of the spiritual realities we have just been speaking about. It forced us to face fears that most of us spend our

entire lives avoiding. The tenderness in relationships which so many speak about to this day is a kind of icon of the love we are called to share eternally with the Holy Trinity at the core of our souls. Community itself was not the reality, nor was it an end in itself. But for those with eyes to see beyond its concrete imperfections, it spoke about the desire for God and the vulnerability involved in seeking to discover our identity in him.

This then is the essence of the vocation to which we were called in the earliest days of community and spiritual renewal. The various manifestations of renewal in those days were of course exciting, but I suspect a wise spiritual director would not set too much store on them because they appealed as much to our natural ego as to our spiritual selves. Our true calling is to something more satisfying and more joyous than spiritual life with the aid of props, because it brings us closer to our identity in the eternal. That is what still binds us together and inspires us, even when scattered across the globe.

Phil Bradshaw



Readers find different things appeal to them in this book: some enjoy the story of the Community, some the reflective section on the significance of community life for the church, some the reflections on a theological journey.

But all seem to enjoy it! The book comes from many years of community living, together with reflection on it in the light of the author's involvement in the life of an ordinary parish.

Still selling on Amazon for £12.99, you can get it from us with post & packing included (£11.50 plus £1.50 p&p, total £13.00).

To order simply send a cheque for £13 made out to CCCT to the **UK** address below (price for two copies £25.50).

What others say

The Community's experiences have touched me and many others...In this perceptive and well written book Phil brings a participant's perspective...his assessments are fair and fresh.

Alan Kreider

The Community's ministry...was a means of substantial healing for me and the source of the core vision which inspired me. I warmly welcome this account of Following the Spirit

Bishop Graham Cray

By focusing on the Community of Celebration, Philip Bradshaw has provided a clear lens through which to view the larger phenomenon [of renewal].

Bishop Christopher Epting