

In November, the Methodist City Centre Network (MCCN) held its 2014 Conference. The Network links over 200 people who work in or are associated with over 130 churches and projects in the centres of our cities and large towns. The network hosts a conference every two years and the theme in 2014 was *Good Leadership - Good News for the Gospel?* There were almost 50 participants including three invited speakers.

Our three speakers were the Revd Helen Dixon Cameron (The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham), Glenn Jordan (Director, Skainos, Belfast) and the Revd Jill Marsh (University of Chester).

Helen took *Creative Leadership* as her title and identified two contrasting views of leadership. In one we see the heroic leader to whom all look and follow, and in the other the leader leads by working with a team who all contribute to leadership. Helen sees the first of these as hard to resist, and dangerous, because everything points to the one person, and others think that everything can be left to that one person. In the second case the leader develops the leadership qualities of the team and points to Christ. Good leaders develop people and leave behind a legacy - people with conviction and the will to carry on. This is creative leadership that recognises (and realises) the creative potential in all, that exercises imagination, and takes the risks that are inherent in being creative. Helen argued that becoming a leader is not the acquisition of a certain set of skills, it is context-dependent. Leadership has to be developed in the situation where it is required, and takes time, possibly a long time, some of it set aside for thinking and reflection. Leadership is open and porous, not fixed, bounded, and above contradiction.

Glenn reflected on the last fourteen years from the demolition of the East Belfast Mission through the development and opening of the Skainos Project in 2012 (www.skainos.org). He suggested five tasks for urban ministers: *energise the imagination* - speak of a future that none think imaginable, *name the fallenness* - and recover a voice to speak of it (Ezekiel 33:21-22), *choose how to be* - to bring healing rather than set ourselves apart (Mark: 6:53-56 & 7:1-4), *walk around* - affirm the story written into the streets and help to tell new stories (Psalm 48:12-14), *foster the as-if community* - living as if the Kingdom of God had come (Zechariah 8:4-5).

In his second session Glenn described the Skainos Project as *Pitching a Tent in East Belfast*. In the story of the project - which Glenn said was a privilege to tell - miracles have resolved impasses but it is not clear how the project became what it is, other than to say it is a response to the community in which it is set, and is not repeatable. Nor is it helpful to give numbers that describe the scale or the costs. To help in telling stories (and to gain ownership) the project needed a name - 'Skainos' is

derived from the New Testament Greek word for tent. Glenn linked this to a reworking of John 1:14 - *The Word was made flesh and moved into the neighbourhood and pitched a tent* - and the idea that Skainos is, like a tent, fragile and moveable. The mission of Skainos is to put flesh on the Gospel by telling new stories, sharing space, engaging art, changing perceptions, increasing porousness.

Jill's title for her session was *Cosmopolitan Methodism* and arose out of her research at the University of Chester. Recognising that the word 'cosmopolitan' has had different meanings she focused on the present attributes of cosmopolitanism. It starts with what is human in humanity, is apparent in what people do and say to engage in 'the otherness of other', can be seen as deviant with people not defining themselves by location, ancestry, citizenship and language. She put the question as to whether Methodism is compatible with cosmopolitanism. Are we in the homeland or the borderland? In negotiation do we play safe or meet challenge? Are we individualistic or interdependent? We are all 'other' to one another and Cosmopolitan Theology recognises the fear of others and recognises the need to share power.

A particular aspect of Jill's research is the study of ethnically diverse congregations and good practice for building them up. She discussed this and then asked conference participants to complete a questionnaire. This same questionnaire has been sent out to all on the MCCN mailing list.

The conference also included sessions on good practice and we heard a number of success stories. Time was found for an unplanned session in which experience of running cafes was shared. The biennial Annual general Meeting was held in which we elected the Coordinating Group including a new Chair and a new Treasurer. The retiring chair, the Revd Martin Turner, was thanked for his leadership over the last four years by the new chair, the Revd David Martin.

[825 words]

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