

## Check against delivery

### **Making history, bringing hope to turn the church Inside Out**

#### **- Mark Russell on 125 years of the work of Church Army an address to General Synod Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

**Opening-** *Your Grace, Chair, members of Synod...It is a real privilege for me to be given this opportunity to address General Synod today in this the 125<sup>th</sup> year of Church Army, to celebrate the role Church Army has played in helping the Church serve this nation.*

It was a good shot. The flower pot descended from the upstairs window and hit the silk top hat with great accuracy and considerable effect. Underneath the now battered hat was a young Anglican clergyman in his early thirties. He was in the firing line because he was leading church-goers in an open air meeting in Kensington.

This part of London was considered well off, yet there were parts of the parish which were best avoided if you valued your reputation or even your life. It was in such an area that this open air meeting was taking place. The young curate was Wilson Carlile and the fearful, faithful bunch of churchgoers came to form the first recruits to Church Army.

The Archbishop of Canterbury of the day accused Carlile of wanting to turn the church upside down. Carlile famously replied, "No your Grace, inside out."

One of the first handbills given out about the work of this new Church Army said this- "Every night at 8 o'clock and Sundays at 3 and 7, Church Army declaration of war against sin and Satan; under the command of the Revd W Carlile. Come if you dare."- it's not exactly how we do things now is it?

I also checked out the questions prospective evangelists were asked in 1883 when the first training college was set up- may I try them out on you?

1. Can you take a back seat and play second fiddle with a happy heart?
2. Can you use the same homely language in speaking for Christ as for your trade?
3. How much indoor and outdoor persecution can you stand without being angry?

Maybe we should stick those in CME !! or at selection conferences!

In January 1883 the Church Times reported that Church Army had done even more than William Booth to provoke blasphemy and disorder and should receive

no encouragement, and ought never to march again. I'm pleased to say that 125 years later both Church Times and Church Army are still here and I hope we've now kissed and made up. Except last year when they called me the Wayne Rooney of the Church of England, a shocking thing to say to a Spurs fan !

Only a couple of years ago Church Army was described in the Times newspaper as the SAS of the Anglican church and by my good friend the Bishop of Maidstone- as reaching out to people in a way that church normally fails to do.

But the church too has moved on, the Mission Shaped Church Agenda is exciting, its radical and it's happening. The Pastoral and Dioceses Measure takes the agenda still forward. We are delighted that we have an established a developing partnership at the heart of the new fresh expressions agenda.

Church Army evangelists work as part of Steven Croft's team and our Sheffield Centre led by George Lings continues to challenge, provoke and support the church into thinking about its evolving role in mission and evangelism.

I count it a huge privilege and very humbling to be leading this society in its 125<sup>th</sup> year. As for any organisation that gets to this age, the most crucial question to ask is why are we here? And at the heart of that question, is why did we start? What was the wrong that the founder saw and wanted to fix? John Wesley once said of the Methodist Church that he prayed it would never lose the power of the Spirit or the reason for which it first set out.

Wilson Carlile saw a Church turning in on itself, a Church that seemed more interested in itself than the millions of people in the land who had real needs- spiritual needs, emotional needs, and often physical needs. They were hungry, homeless and desolate. Carlile saw a Church that was disengaged with many people, and was out of touch. He wanted the church to do more to share faith through words and action by mobilizing ordinary people to share the good news of the gospel.

Carlile believed passionately in 3 C's as he termed them at the heart of this new movement -

**conversion, consecration and church membership.**

Good Anglican that I am I would endorse these but add three of my own

**Firstly- Co-operation** across this church in all traditions, and in working ecumenically in mission and evangelism. Partnership and working together must become even more important as the resources available to the church become increasingly under pressure.

**Secondly - Compassion-** to reach out to those Carlile would describe as the least the last and the lost. Eugene Peterson says of Jesus in Matthew 9, he looked out over the Crowd and his heart was broken in two. We need the compassion of Jesus for those in our land who are hurting, broken, wounded, and in need.

And thirdly, being **Contemporary-** to understand the needs of the culture we are working with and to be culturally relevant and sensitive about how we do mission. Fresh Expressions don't undermine or devalue the inherited church, they simply say, in this modern world, this Google generation needs different models of being church.

Church Army has always been a home for all traditions within the church of England- evangelical, anglo-catholic, liberal, high, low and in the middle.

We spend so much time talking about what divides us. But surely as a Church we should remain united in our commitment to sharing faith through words and action. Today I want to recommit Church Army to being a gift to the church in working out what this means in our culture, as Fatboy Slim would put it, right here right now.

When the Archbishop of Canterbury commissioned me last year he said that mission produces thanksgiving. I think more and more the Church has got the message that mission is important. But frequently it has got it for the wrong reasons. As I travel round the country people tell me mission is important because they are worried there won't be a Church in 20 years time. Or maybe we start to do evangelism because we are worried we can't pay our pensions bill.

These are not good enough reasons. We do mission and evangelism, we reach out, because people need Jesus and we passionately believe they need his grace in their lives, they need to know their sins forgiven, and then they will give thanksgiving to God. The Church seeing new Christians, gives thanksgiving, and the whole mission exercise, gives the glory to God.

That is what Church Army is passionate about- getting people to meet Jesus. We go out beyond church walls to meet people who are way beyond the church's reach to tell them about Jesus, to show them Jesus. Reaching out to people where they are and sharing faith with them at the point they'd like the conversation to begin.

As I have travelled all over the country I have seen some great people. I went to Ellesmere Port and met Rob Barker and Richard Tett who take a big double-decker bus into estates in the Diocese to meet loads of young people. I saw how a former Sikh Kinder Kalsi is seeking to serve the local community in Langsett. I met Edwin Bates and the team doing stunning work at the Marylebone Project London's largest dedicated homeless women's only hostel. In Manchester I met

Ben Edson and the guys who run Sanctus1 an emerging church reaching out to young professionals. I met Nick Russell who works in Kidbrooke in south-east London, an estate full of social needs and issues.

I could tell you about our work with asylum seekers and alcoholics, I could tell you about Malt Cross in Nottingham reaching those spilling onto the streets from pubs and clubs. Story after story, of bringing people to a place where they meet Jesus, the real, exciting, dynamic, passionate, radical, amazing, wonderful, dangerous, loving Jesus.

We are delighted to be premiering the short DVD which begins with some footage of Wilson Carlile himself and ends up with another 30 something guy who is passionate about Church Army, and convinced that it is needed just as much now as in 1882. This is not a slick or expensive PR film but a gritty glimpse of the important and life changing work Church Army- in a visual age this will be available on the Church Army site and via You Tube, and on my blog. Please think about sharing it with your diocese/church/parish and hosting it on your website. There is a pack available for you today with a complimentary copy in it. So here it is "Making History, Bringing Hope"

## **CONCLUSION**

Carlile and all those Church Army evangelists down the years inspire me. We are so blessed today to inherit that tradition and heritage. I don't think the factors that motivated Carlile to found Church Army have gone away. They are different in some ways, but people are still in need. There is still homelessness, and poverty. There are millions of people who have no connection with the Church. For mission and meeting the needs of people is in our very DNA. Our agenda, our passion, our zeal is what the Church so desperately needs.

Walking down the Charing Cross road recently I met Matthew. He is only 21 years old, and has been homeless for two years. We talked together, and I told him I would be here today talking to you. I asked him, "What was the most important thing the Church could do today?" He replied, "Bring hope to people". Matt and I then prayed together. I was profoundly moved by this, and have been struck deeply by his words. Our challenge as a church must be to bring hope to people. Martin Luther King put it like this; *"If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving."*

Carlile's vision of ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things in the power of the holy spirit was remarkable, his desire to bring hope to people. Church Army wants to work with you, together to seek to bring Christ and his good news to our 21<sup>st</sup> century context- in your diocese, parish and community.

Thank you for your support and your prayers. Thank you for listening.