

A Local Habitation?
The importance of place within today's Scottish Episcopal Church
A discussion paper from the Local Collaborative Ministry Task Group

The following paper has been written by the LCM Task Group in response to persistent queries about the meaning and value of the 'local' in Collaborative Ministry. Far from being a definitive statement on the issue, the paper is simply intended as a tool to stimulate wider discussion on this topic, and to this end we have appended four questions in Appendix 1 which we hope will aid and direct that task.

Part 1 The loss of a sense of place

*We are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement,
Travelling light is now the asset of power.
Zygmunt Bauman Liquid Modernity*

When invited recently to think of an image that captured the zeitgeist, a member of the Local Collaborative Ministry Task Group chose that of a couple walking through an ex-urban shopping mall, one partner clutching a mobile phone and conducting work-related business loudly through it, the other displaying an abstracted gaze beneath her I-Pod headphones. For another member, the predominant symbol was that of the fast-growing web site, 'My Space', a site wherein 'one can meet people and make friends'. Both images were well chosen, for they encapsulated several of the characteristics of the age: atomised individualism, market consumerism, the elective self, networked business and a disconnectedness with context. It is that latter trait, "the loss of a sense of place" to use Irish theologian Oliver O'Donovan's phrase¹, that forms the subject of this enquiry.

Many commentators of decaying modernity² describe it as a "liquid era"³, a period in which "the importance of place is secondary to the importance of flows"⁴, an era in which "space is conceived of as flow rather than place"⁵. A period in which employees are no longer *tied down* to a particular location by *heavy industry*, *rooted to the spot* by the constraints of weather and season, supply and demand but rather one in which capital flies *weightlessly* through cyberspace at the touch of a computer key and unseasonable vegetables are *air-lifted* to supermarkets overnight. A period in which jobs long associated with a particular area can disappear from the host community – Borders weaving, Clydeside shipbuilding, Dundee jute trade - merely by a decision made on the other side of the globe. The solidity of the past is in direct contrast to the "lightness of being" of the present.

Within such an era, people operate as "vagabond"⁶ or dislocated selves, remote from any 'place in life'. For the employed and the wealthy⁷, work, leisure, eating and commerce occur in a multitude of different networks, and home becomes merely a place for sleep. As Martin Albrow has written

*the communities of the global age generally have no local centre. People living in the same street will have fleeting relationships with each other, having widely differing lifestyles and household arrangements.*⁸

Such anonymous living, moreover, often occurs in equally dislocated landscapes, spaces devoid of the symbolic expressions of identity, relations and history; one civic centre or suburb is, after all, simply a clone of any other, presided over by the global ikons of McDonalds, Nike and Tesco. Our society lacks what social geographer Anne Buttimer calls 'place identity'; we have, she argues, de-emphasised place for the sake of economic values such as mobility, centralisation and rationalisation.

¹ Oliver O'Donovan "The loss of a sense of place" pps 39-58 in *The Irish Theological Quarterly* vol. 55, no 1 (1989)

² Such a term is, in the author's eyes, preferable to the more widely used term of **post**-modernity

³ viz Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* Polity (2000) and, as applied, to ecclesiology, *Liquid Church* Pete Ward Paternoster Press (2002)

⁴ *Mission-Shaped Church: church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context* Church House Publishing (2004), 4-5

⁵ *Faith in Suburbia; completing the contextual trilogy* Malcolm Brown Contact Monograph 15, (2005), 21

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), 240

⁷ One should note the caution offered by one respondent to the Church Pastoral Review Measures Working Party; "the only people to whom 'place' matters these days are the poor who can't escape from the place they're in", quoted in Malcolm Brown *Faith in Suburbia; Completing the Contextual Trilogy* Contact Monograph 15, (2005), 21

⁸ Martin Albrow *The Global Age* Polity Press (1999), 29.

*The skyscrapers, airports, freeways and other stereotypical components of modern landscapes – are they not the sacred symbols of a civilisation that has deified reach and derided home?*⁹

Much that has been written in recent years in the field of ecclesiology has sought to baptise this world view in which 'reach' is paramount and 'home' derided; patterns of ministry and mission have been devised which seek to fit this networked, dislocated state of affairs. John Finney, for instance, in an examination of the emerging church, argues that "the church must expand beyond the incarnational model which we know so well into new patterns that we are only now beginning to discern"¹⁰ while Peter Neilson, in a consideration of changing patterns of church life for a changing Scotland, asserts that "we will be required to invest as much in 'network church' as we have traditionally invested in 'neighbourhood church'."¹¹ While it is true that in order to evangelise and make new disciples, the church must be alert to changing lifestyle patterns in today's 24/7 society and sympathetic to the new circumstances under which people live, work and play, there is nevertheless a danger in simply capitulating to the *status quo* or colluding with it uncritically.

Firstly it should be noted that human beings have a deep hunger, indeed a need, for a sense of place and a sense of home. Simone Weil in her seminal book *The Need for Roots* wrote

*To be rooted is perhaps the most important need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his (sic) real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future. This participation is a natural one, in the sense that it is naturally brought about by place, conditions of birth, profession and social surroundings*¹².

Home is more than a place to live; it is a place of *belonging*; the place where, 'when you have to go there, / they have to take you in / I should have called it / something you somehow haven't to deserve.'¹³ People inhabit far more than *space* in the places where they live; they inhabit a wisdom and a sense of co-responsibility transmitted through the generations, through the very surroundings and most of all through living with difference. Two recent pieces of writing give flavour of this, the first being a reflection by Rabbi Lionel Blue on his neighbourhood in a multicultural suburb of London.

*I've never encountered real hostility here, just common human kindness though we've become a pretty mixed lot. At the Turkish grocery, I apologetically buy a single tomato. 'You buy too much food uncle' the grocer says shaking his head. 'Don't get too big, uncle.' I'm touched. His advice is contrary to commercial and he's allotted me a place in his Mediterranean family. He also calls a friend of mine Mama. These titles mean more than our Honorary Fellowships or the two-for-one price offers at supermarkets. The new immigrants have brought back a respect for oldies which ordinary British life was beginning to lose. Two Pakistani girls stand up for me on the bus, and I accept without arguing. And a Caribbean lady guards my shopping in the queue when I feel queasy. At the local Hindu festival I try my hand at what looks like bingo - legs eleven and all that. But it was nothing so secular. The players are filling in their virtue meters. In this communal mix I feel proud of my own lot, the mature Jewish women who help staff the charity shops and give immigrants, locals and street people the attention you might expect in Bond Street*¹⁴

The second is by the American social commentator Mindy Thompson Fullilove writing about African-American neighbourhoods in Roanoke, Virginia and the Hill district of Pittsburgh

*In Northeast there was no poverty because everyone helped each other. When we could afford two pounds of beans, our wives would cook them up and everybody would have a bowl. If our next door neighbour didn't have a job, we would help them out. We were independently self-supporting as a neighbourhood. We enjoyed it, because we knew we had someone to rely on. The neighbourhood was knitted together by having an active street life. Interactions of all kinds kept the Hill afloat and made sure everyone ate, had clothes to wear, and behaved properly. The boys on the street got advice from older men: the dancers and musicians taught them how to refine their arts; the pimps showed them an easy way to make money; the regular guys urged them to go straight.*¹⁵

⁹ Quoted in *A Christian Theology of Place* John Inge Ashgate (2003), 17

¹⁰ John Finney *Emerging Evangelism* DLT (2004), 145

¹¹ Peter Neilson *Church on the Move: New Church. New Generation*, New Scotland Covenanters Press (2005) 77

¹² Simone Weil *The Need for Roots* Putnam (1952) 43

¹³ Robert Frost "The Death of the Hired Man"

¹⁴ Rabbi Lionel Blue Thought for the Day 14.08.06 www.bbc.co.uk/radio4

In such places, Fullilove comments, “the way of life evolves over time, as each effort at problem resolution becomes part of the collective memory and the collective foundation for problem-solving”.¹⁶ Generational knowledge evolves.

Tear people away from all that, uproot them from such neighbourhoods, and they suffer what Fullilove evocatively calls ‘root shock’, a paralyzing sense of sense of anxiety, alienation and suspicion, ‘the unholy trinity of uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety’ which Bauman writes about in *In Search of Politics*. Interviewees who had been transported to new neighbourhoods through a process of urban renewal and gentrification spoke of a loss of friendships, local knowledge and mutual care, but also of an increase in anonymity and fear:

See that apartment across the street? I think in the last year about five different families have lived there. I don't know whether they stay in the house, or whether they work.. Every once in a while you see someone pulling up in a car, or they might get in a car and leave, but you just don't see them. Northeast, you didn't have to lock your doors, just shut your door and go in the house, go to bed and leave the front door standing open, just the screen door shut. But here, well you are not even safe in there with your doors locked.¹⁷

Similar stories could of course be told from this side of the Atlantic too, in towns and cities across the UK, as in rural areas which are likewise experiencing major, though different, upheavals. It is hardly surprising, then, that as traditional communities are swept away through urban planning and rural migration, a hankering for simulacra of communitarian living grows apace; estates are being built which mimic ‘village living’, “forcing residents to become more sociable”¹⁸ while soaps are based upon the ideas of situated living (Coronation Street, East Enders, River City) and close relationships. (Friends, Neighbours, The Archers).

Networked living, then, is destabilised living – but worse than that, it is *homogeneous* living. Networks, by their very nature, are communities of the likeminded, webs of connections between those with a common purpose or outlook on life, similar interests, shared goals. They are characterised by uniformity and the security of sameness. A society predicated upon such communities of similarity withdraws “from risk-ridden complexity into the shelter of uniformity”¹⁹, binding people into “cultural ghettos rather than genuine mixed communities”²⁰. And therein lies the danger; for those who are not the same become ‘the other’. History has shown all too starkly how rotten the fruits of such ghettoism can be; it does not take long before suspicion and insecurity lead to xenophobia and ethnic cleansing.

Part 2 The importance of the local

*By drawing his boundaries closely about him,
he had freed his imagination to travel through space and time.
He had reached an understanding of the Orkney islands,
and of the generations who had inhabited them for over five thousand years
Maggie Fergusson George Mackay Brown*

At a point in history when the loss of a sense of place caused by a global, flexible labour market, urban renewal, and ever-increasing social mobility is having “painful consequences for a vast numbers of people”²¹, the Church has a duty to be prophetic, to be “unassimilated to the secular world which it nonetheless addresses”;²² it has a duty to challenge the relentless slide into networked living and ghettoised existence and to posit other, better, ways of relating. In an article entitled “Incarnation and the renewal of community” Rowan Williams wrote

The relations of human beings in the Body of Christ provide the context and the critique for other systems, the irritant that can prevent the human world from simply settling down with mutually exclusive and competing tribalisms. The doctrine of the Incarnation is recovered and revitalised so often as we receive our authority as a Christian community to challenge and resist what holds back human community.²³

¹⁵ Mindy Thompson Fullilove *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighbourhoods Hurts America, And What We Can Do About It* New York (2004), 82 and 32

¹⁶ *ibid*, 42

¹⁷ *op cit* 15, 83

¹⁸ “Field of dreams” *The Economist* July 29th 2006, 27

¹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman *Liquid Modernity* Polity Press (2006) 179-180

²⁰ Bernard Hare “Eastside Stories” page 6 *The Guardian* 30.08.06

²¹ John Inge *A Christian Theology of Place* Ashgate (2003) 28

²² Nicholas Boyle *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* T and T Clark (1988), 91

²³ Rowan Williams “Incarnation and the Renewal of Community” 225-238 in *On Christian Theology* Blackwell Publishers (2000), 237-8

Christianity places a high value on the concept of 'place' because the experience of God's grace has ever been earthed in a particular context. As Timothy Jenkins puts it: "God is to be found embodied in a particular place, locality, people; the materials of time and history can show him forth".²⁴ Biblical faith is a situated faith; well may Brueggemann speak of the Bible's 'preoccupation for placement'.²⁵ The God of the Old and New Testaments is one who "tabernacles with God's people"²⁶, always making herself known in particular locales: Bethel and Babylon, Shiloh and Sinai.

*In the Old Testament there is no spaceless time. There is rather storied place, that is a place which has meaning because of the history lodged there. There are stories which have authority because they are located in a place. This means that biblical faith cannot be presented simply as a historical movement indifferent to place which could have happened in one setting as well as another, because it is undeniably fixed in this place with this meaning.*²⁷

Nor does the New Testament record contradict this emphasis. The 'transitory promises of particular election' which run through the Hebrew Scriptures

*are not abolished by Christian faith into pure universality, but their exclusivity is taken up; they are, as it were, replicated. They become the matrix for the forms in which God universally meets mankind. It is still the case that human beings encounter God within relations of particular belonging.*²⁸

The Gospel writers are at pains to show that Jesus' ministry is geographically grounded in particular places – Cana-in-Galilee, Capernaum, Bethany, Nain, Jericho, Jerusalem – the names of which they take care to record for posterity. Particularity of place is intrinsic to the incarnational character of Christian faith. What is somewhat more contentious is what Jesus' *teaching* and *example* - and the missionary task enjoined upon his disciples both pre- and post-Pentecost - have to say to our practice of ministry today – and that is one topic around which we hope this paper will encourage debate (see App.1)

This is not to deny the *universality* of faith on the other hand; Biblical theology also underlines the supra-locative character of the divine-human encounter. No place or building can ever 'capture' the divine; to suggest otherwise is idolatrous. God ultimately stands beyond all times and all places; the word is always universal. "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4, 24). Yet 'placelessness' must be held in tension with 'place', for "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"(John 1, 14); it is in the particular, the contingent and the located that the otherness of the Transcendent is apprehended. And *salvation* likewise; while there is in the New Testament a shift away from an emphasis upon an earthly Jerusalem, nevertheless salvation is still represented in terms of place, the heavenly city. (Heb 12, 12). The culmination of the eschatological vision in Revelation is the descent of the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, an image which is both city and garden (Rev 21, 10 – 22.2) Those who would argue that the importance of place in the New Testament is superseded by the person of Jesus Christ would do well to note these telling words at the conclusion of Inge's study of the scriptural consideration of place:

*The New Testament material would suggest that a high view of place flows from the incarnation and that place is important psychologically and eschatologically as well as physically. The final promise in the New Testament as in the Old is of placedness.*²⁹

The challenge is that of balancing a gospel conviction that Christ, as Lord of time and space, has redeemed *all* places, with a belief in the importance of the incarnation which invites us still to value particularity of place.

The church likewise is both universal and local – but several commentators in recent years have suggested that it should cherish and even play up the *latter* characteristic. In many places, where other symbols of local identity have vanished, the church is often the sole carrier of the narratives of place, history and community, and thus has a responsibility to pay close attention to those aspects of its way of being. In a dehumanising climate of 'meta-narratives' and 'big pictures' such as we described above,

²⁴ Timothy Jenkins "Anglicanism: the only answer to modernity" 103-116 in *An Experiment in Providence; how faith engages with the world*. SPCK (2006), 112

²⁵ Walter Brueggemann *The Land; Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (1977), 3

²⁶ Belden Lane "Landscape and Spirituality; a tension between" pps 4-13 in *Spirituality in Time and Place The Way Supplement 73*, (1992), 5

²⁷ *op cit* 25, 187

²⁸ *op cit* 1, 56

²⁹ *op cit* 21, 58

the Church of the future will need to draw its moral strength not from its international presence but from its claim to represent people as they are locally and distinct from the world-wide ramifications of their existence in the global market.³⁰

Similarly the anthropologist/theologian Timothy Jenkins in a study entitled “An Experiment in Providence” – the title adverts to his belief that the task of ministry is that of finding out ‘how God is present *in a place*’ – argues that particular communities of faith need to pay far more attention to their context and setting than hitherto, and receive contingency as a vital resource; “I would suggest”, he writes

that we see the world not as flat and homogeneous, but as heterogeneous, made up of small practices summoned by compulsions which call forth discernment and commitment. We need to adjust our perception of scale concerning the modes in which significant action is taken and to deal with particular communities, histories and traditions.³¹

So what are the beneficial characteristics of congregations which are ‘rooted’ in a local context?

- Rooted congregations witness to the value of **stability**. “Staying put” within a fairly restricted locale, perhaps the locale of one’s birth - is an underrated virtue in a frenetic world of fluid employment markets and global travel, yet much benefit can accrue from it. As a commentator on the Benedictine Order recently wrote, the commitment to stability (the first of the order’s three vows) “enables spiritual energy to be released and channelled to great effect”.³² A wonderful example of this can be seen in the life and work of the Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown. Brown seldom left his native Orkney Islands in later life, yet this did not restrict his ability to write about, or connect with, the wider world. On the contrary, his poetry ‘threw light onto large, real, outward things’.³³ Brown’s fellow poets Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes comment as follows:

Orkney was his gateway to the completely imagined. His work constituted itself into and out of this world in equal measure. He retreated to the point where he (could) see in it an internal reflection, a

very clear simplification, a penetrating simplification, that he could never observe if he were in the middle of the hurly burly with the whole thing going around him from day to day, disrupting him

from

moment to moment.³⁴

Similarly by ‘paying attention’ to their setting - the industries, history, produce and landscape peculiar to their context – and reflecting theologically upon the significance of these, rooted congregations find it possible to offer hope-filled images and stories of endurance and transformation to their local community and to the wider church.

- Rooted congregations witness to the value of *heterogeneous* **solidarity**. Rather than being made up of ‘people who think, look, behave the same as I do’ as in a network church, the local church at its best evinces a complex, sometimes chaotic, mix of folk, thrown together by the exigencies of geography; it is a community which adverts not to the contemporary norms of supermarket eclecticism and self-chosen identity, but to the *biblical* principles of vocation and faithful response. ‘You did not choose me; I chose you’, Jesus said to his disciples (John, 15, 16). Local congregational life teaches the value of listening to and learning from ‘the other’, of coping harmoniously with difference, of living in the fullness of Christ’s peace – and through reflecting on that experience, has something very powerful to say to a society yearning for new forms of community in an alienating world.
- Rooted congregations witness to the value of **smallness**. In the emergent literature about small healthy congregations³⁵ one of the primary benefits of membership cited is that of belonging to a community “where everyone knows my/the children’s names”, a feature which ‘programme’ or ‘corporate’ sized churches lack. Fredrica Harris Thompsett, outlining the preliminary findings of the “Born of Water, Born of the Spirit” research being carried out by the Episcopal Divinity School, Mass., told a gathering in the SEC in March of a church in

³⁰ *op cit* 22, 92

³¹ *op cit* 24, 24

³² Alan Amos “Stability: the virtue of staying in one place” *The Reader Journal* Winter (2005), 15

³³ Naomi Mitchison quoted in Maggie Fergusson *George Mackay Brown: The Life* John Murray (2006), 212

³⁴ *Ibid*, 211-2

³⁵ For instance Jackson Carroll *Small Churches are Beautiful* (1977); Carl Dudley *Making the Small Church Effective* (1978); David Ray *The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches* (2003); Lyle Schaller *Small Congregation, Big Potential* (2003); Peter Bush and Christine O’Reilly *Where 20 Or 30 are Gathered* (2006)

the States where the *entire* congregation signs the Certificate that is given to the newly baptised. What better way to symbolise the congregation's promise to care and teach the new disciple?

We welcome you; we will care for you; we will share our faith with you.

In this and other ways small congregations cherish "the little narratives"³⁶ which are so often forgotten or swept aside by society at large, and yet which give people significance and worth.

- Rooted congregations witness to the value of local **sustainability**. The church can only expect its voice to be heard in the debate about global warming, climate change and eco-friendly ways of being if its own carbon footprint is minimised; local churches, accessed on foot on Sundays, are significantly greener than gathered congregations and out-of-town mega-churches which necessitate travel by car. But more than that, local churches can, by their very location, join in with locally-driven developments and policy-making, and take 'initiatives to sustain some of the services people require',³⁷ thus contributing to the social and economic viability of the communities in which they are set.

'Stability', 'solidarity-in-difference', 'smallness' and 'sustainability': these four characteristics of 'rooted' congregations are vital ingredients to humane living. (In Appendix 1 we invite you to consider the downsides of such rootedness). Churches which manifest these traits need to be sustained in the twenty-first century for the sake of the 'life of the world', and it is to that topic that we now turn.

Part 3 Supporting the local in the Scottish Episcopal Church

Local Collaborative Ministry was brought to birth in Scotland out of a recommitment by the SEC to working within rural communities across the length and breadth of our nation, and affirming their particularity. The Rural Commission Report and the subsequent vote by Synod was a pledge by our church to continue to treat 'the local' as important, and to find creative ways of sustaining - and growing - the mission of small rural charges, wherever they were situated.

*If we believe that God has given ministry to each local unit of his Church, then we must have an agreed stated policy to identify, train and utilise such gifts. Local congregations need to be helped to see that within their own membership there are the resources adequately to run a church and promote its life, work and mission. We look forward to models of ministry in which the talents, skills and vocations of all members of the congregation are recognised, affirmed, trained, deployed and evaluated.*³⁸

The main thrust of LCM's work in recent years has been the delivery of theological education at charge level, enabling local congregations indeed to have their many gifts 'recognised, affirmed, trained, deployed and evaluated'. Amongst the vocations that have emerged in these local contexts – gifts of administration, pastoral care, teaching, hospitality, catechesis and prayer – is that of sacramental ministry, and thus our church (in keeping with the suggestion of the Rural Commission Review³⁹) is experimenting with the training and deployment of Ordained Local Priests and Deacons.

Put very baldly, OLMs are people whose vocations emerge from and are bounded by their particular local context; they are selected, trained and licensed to serve only *within* the 'team of ministers' that is their home congregation or cluster of congregations, and sometimes more particularly from within a Ministry Enabling Group. Their license is to that place and that place alone; in other words, they are not deployable across a diocese or region; their vocation is intimately linked with the vision of the charge or cluster in which they serve.

The charism of the OLM is predicated on two principles: *a vocation to serve* the local (charge/community), and *a vocation to stay*. As in monastic life, the commitment to 'stability', the virtue of staying in one place, is a commitment to a particular community, a community consisting of those who, together, seek to live in *obedience* to God's calling and seek a profound *conversion of life*, working together as a sign of the Kingdom in that particular place. And what better way to categorise a congregation's corporate vocation than that? Far from being 'third class clerics' as is sometimes argued, OLMs are a sign of the church's commitment to the importance of a sense of 'place' in people's lives today, hallowing the local and the ordinary. In what follows, the stories are told of two such vocations as they have emerged in recent years.

³⁶ *op cit* 22, 163

³⁷ Bruce Cameron "Isolated communities" Chapter 3 in *Changing Rural Life; a Christian response to key rural issues* eds Jeremy Martineau, Leslie Francis and Peter Francis Canterbury Press (2004), 58

³⁸ *The Rural Commission Report* (1995), 16; *The Rural Commission Review* (1996), 11

³⁹ *The Rural Commission Review* (1996), 11

Story 1. St Paul's, Kinlochleven

The village of Kinlochleven is an isolated and self-contained village of 1000 people situated at the head of Loch Leven and at the end of a seven mile narrow, twisting road from Glencoe. Set beneath the towering peak of Binnein Mor, the village came into existence through the establishment of a hydro-electric scheme and allied aluminium smelting; indeed the geography of the place, the history of community and the presence of this industry are inextricably linked. The majority of houses in the village were built by the company for their workers, and at one time the entire population of Kinlochleven worked directly for, or was dependent on, the smelter. Over a period of six years in the mid-1990s, the plant closed down, leaving only the electricity generating unit in production. The village, however, has survived this closure thanks to careful planning by the Company, the rise of tourism - the village is situated on the West Highland Way - and imaginative use of the redundant factory site. It has a real community feel to it, possessing as it does its own school, GP surgery, Post Office, Police Station and several churches, plus an active Working Men's Club. Walking around the village, it is clear that 'the locals' both know each other by name and watch out for each other's wellbeing.

The congregation of St Paul's mirrors the community profile closely. It is small (15-20 on a Sunday), proud of itself, self-contained and predominantly working-class. It has lived through years of economic uncertainty and decline, survived them and come out with greater self-confidence and vitality. People speak of it as 'a family' and it does indeed demonstrate all the strengths (and weaknesses) of such an analogy. Members, who all live locally - most in fact walk to church - are deeply concerned about one another's welfare and care intimately for each other; an unusually high level of mutual pastoral care is evinced within the body. On the other hand, the congregation is naturally wary, given the village's history, of imposed change, and takes time to form trusting relationships with representatives of the wider church before it can countenance alteration to its patterns of worship and polity; it warms to strong, male, leadership.

As well as being a close family, it is also a very mission-focussed congregation; the Vestry has a wealth of wisdom and experience of community life both in the village and in wider society, and the congregation's fund-raising is directed to missionary endeavours as much as to maintenance. St Paul's is concerned to tap into the possibilities and challenges of the village's tourist status, and in recent years has shown imagination in so doing.

The congregation has been served for many years by an itinerant priest with responsibility for several charges in the West Highland Region of the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles, covering many tens of square miles not to mention the sea journeys necessary to reach the islands of Coll, Tiree, Muck, Eigg, Mull and Iona. Weather and geography alone conspire to make this an unsatisfactory arrangement, and the adding of five more charges onto that priest's workload has pushed the scheme to unwieldy limits. The congregation of St Paul's, desirous of having its own local priestly focus, recently called from within its membership Donald Davidson, who, with his wife Lesley and three teenage sons, lives half a minute's walk away from St Paul's. Donald has lived and worked in the village for many years, coming as an employee of the Smelting Company and subsequently suffering all the traumas of the decline of that industry at first hand. During those years he shared tirelessly in the ministry of practical care and pastoral support shown by the entire congregation. Recognising his particular gifts in pastoral leadership and worship, the Bishop licensed Donald as a Lay Worship Leader. The latter's innate sensitivity, humility and rootedness in the family of the church meant that gradually he found such a ministry becoming acceptable even to the diehards, culminating in a Christmas Service using the Reserved Sacrament. The congregation recognised a calling to priesthood in him, which Donald subsequently discerned likewise; this vocation is truly rooted both in the candidate's own faith journey and that of the congregation.

True to the ideal of OLM ministry as outlined on the previous page, the formation of the candidate is being done *in community*, with a group of six members of the congregation committing to a programme of study alongside Donald. Donald may indeed send some written assignments to his Bishop for assessment, but the group likewise has shared the fruits of *its* corporate learning - on Hebrew Scripture, for instance - with the congregation within the Sunday sermon slot. Meanwhile, the wider congregation has similarly committed itself to attending regular sessions as here introduced:

*Some, through ordination, are called to focus the priestly and diaconal ministries of the whole people of God. Donald is one such. But this does not mean that Donald, when priested, will **do** all the work of ministry in St Paul's. He couldn't - and shouldn't. Every member of the Body of Christ here has a responsibility to live out her/his particular ministry to the best of her/his ability, and it is for this reason that Bishop Martin has asked LCM to work with us all during the period of Donald's training to equip us all for our ministries of service and care, to one another and to the community in which St Paul's is set. There will thus be a series of*

congregational workshops in the coming months on Pastoral Care, Biblical Theology, our Episcopalian heritage and Liturgy, delivered by a variety of people from across the Province - but delivered locally, right here in Kinlochleven. We are important, and the wider church wants to affirm this by providing resources for our ongoing formation as disciples of Christ.

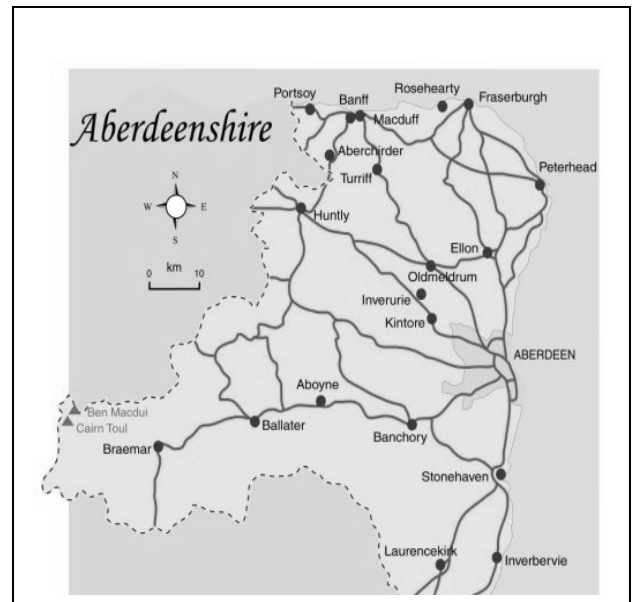
Donald was ordained as a Transitional Deacon early on in his OLM formational journey, affirming the diaconal leadership ministry he had been exercising for many years in the midst of St Paul's. A year later the Advisory Panel returned to the context to hear the stories of the learning that has gone on within the Ministry Enabling Group, in the congregation at large and in Donald's own self-understanding. Each component of this journey is as important to the Panel as any other; if one is lacking, then all suffer, so inextricably linked are the corporate and the individual vocations seen to be. The outcome of that second period of discernment was that Donald was recommended for ordination to the priesthood and the service took place on May 6th this year. While Donald's orders are universal, the *exercise* of his ordained ministry properly belongs to this one context and this one context alone. Kinlochleven is a very bounded place, as alien geographically, culturally, economically and socially to Glencoe seven miles down the glen as it is to Oban; geographical contiguity does not imply similarity of culture, a fact often overlooked when attempts are made to yoke two congregations into a linked charge. Donald's vocation has been grown in, and is proper to, this specific set of circumstances; like a dialect, his ministry is locally particular, and not easily translatable across geographical or congregational borders. Thus were Donald to move, he would have to bed down in the receiving congregation for several years, and then see whether it called him – and he felt called – to exercise his ordained ministry in that different place.

Story 2 St Congan's, Turriff contributed by Susan Macdonald

Turriff, with a current population of 4600, lies approx 35 miles north of Aberdeen and 170 miles north of Edinburgh. The town, characterized by distinctive red sandstone houses - sandstone can be found in abundance there - is situated at an elevation of 166 feet above sea level and sits at the confluence of the Idoch Water and the River Deveron. Ossian, the Gaelic poet, first mentioned it in the 6th century, describing it as the capital of the Pictish prince Lathmon. Little is known of its early history but it is believed that St Congan founded a monastery near there in the 8th century. The Old Church was built by the 11th century and in 1179 the Knights Templar, an order of the military monks, were given land in Turriff to set up their second establishment in Scotland. The monks were responsible for recruiting a great many people to fight in the Crusades.

The town gained burgh status in 1512 and grew primarily as the trading centre for a large agricultural area. A significant planned expansion to the town took place in the 1760s, and various agricultural industries were operating in the town by the early 1800s. Turriff also benefitted from being on the route of the main road from Aberdeen to Banff, and in 1857 the railway arrived, though it was to stay for less than a century until 1951. The main road still passes through Turriff, and it remains a bustling place and is perhaps best known for the 'Turra Show'. Dating from 1864, this annual two-day agricultural show in August is one of the largest in Scotland, regularly attracting around 40,000 visitors per annum, and serving to highlight the importance of agriculture to the local area. Modern day Turriff is still the main centre for its rural farming hinterland, with a range of local shops and restaurants, swimming pool, golf course, caravan park and sports centre and there is a steady demand for new housing as the area continues to attract a number of newly-retired people from far and wide as well as Aberdeen commuters. The latter are possibly attracted by the town's primary school and a secondary school which also attract pupils from surrounding communities as they are seen as providing some of the best education in the area.

The current Episcopal Church in Turriff, dedicated to St Congan, was erected in 1862 and from that date employed (though most often through augmentation received from the Province and/or the Diocese) a stipendiary Rector/Priest-in-Charge, living in a Rectory close to the church. For at least the past fifty years St Congan has been linked with one or more other SEC churches in the area, and continuously with St Luke's, Cuminestown, some five miles to the south.



The most recent half-time stipendiary Priest-in-Charge retired at the end of April 2006, and the NSM, who retired at the end of October had been in post since 1997. In October 2004, aware of this pending situation, and also of a group of four congregations (*Longside, New Pitsligo, Old Deer and Strichen*) to the east seeking stipendiary oversight, the Bishop proposed that Turriff and Cuminestown seek to form a cluster with the congregations and, with appropriate oversight and resourcing, Local Collaborative Ministry would be developed across the cluster.

In the consultation process that followed, a number of meetings were held across the proposed cluster area and these included a total of 14 open meetings for the congregation of St Congan alone, these taking place between the beginning of January 2004 and the end of March 2005. These meetings took a variety of forms but always included discussion and reflection on the principles and practice of LCM and such things as reaching decisions by consensus. All meetings were facilitated by the Diocesan Mission & Ministry Officer and latterly also by Graham Taylor, LCM Mentor. The outcome is that the group of 6 churches will form not one but two LCM locales - Turriff being one and the other five congregations forming a new Central Buchan LCM Group. The process highlighted that although all six congregations were in Central Buchan, and could thus be thought to form a natural cluster, this was not the case. For instance, the other five congregations are distinctly rural whereas Turriff is most definitely a town, with a number of amenities and services which allow it to be self-sufficient in many ways. The five rural congregations, however, when looking to towns in the area for schooling and shopping and other amenities and services, did not consider Turriff to be an option – mainly because other towns in the area were more accessible to them.

The consultation resulted in St Congan deciding to become an LCM congregation in its own right. The Rectory has been sold, thus visibly breaking the ties with this model of ministry, and after the NSM retired at the end of October a retired priest living some 30 miles distant now presides at the Eucharist on two Sundays a month and is available for pastoral issues and emergencies that may require a priest. All other aspects of the life of St Congan's are the responsibility of the congregation who receive continuing support and resourcing from the LCM Mentor and the Diocesan Mission & Ministry Officer. The congregation has also affirmed the calling of one of its members to Ordained Local Ministry and a Provincial Panel visited the context in June 2006 and is due to return in August 2007. Appropriate individual and congregational development plans have been devised in agreement with the Diocesan Mission & Ministry Officer and the Provincial Local Collaborative Ministry Officer, and the congregation has whole-heartedly entered into this life-long process with 14-22 people attending each meeting (av. Sunday attendance of under 30).

There has been a significant Christian presence in and around Turriff from at least the 8th century and St Congan's plays a significant part in maintaining and strengthening this today. The current life and witness of the congregation continues to mirror more and more the context in which it is set. There is an awareness of the significant number of visitors to the area and the church remains open for them throughout the day with information on various relevant topics readily available. Should visitors arrive during worship or other activities in the church, they are warmly and genuinely welcomed into the midst of those present, echoing the experience of the welcome received by incomers from local people when they come to live in the town or its surrounds. The membership of the congregation truly reflects the mix of "natives and newcomers" found in Turriff and its surrounds, and in fact model a way of integration of the same in their worship, learning, outreach, administration of the charge and ecumenical activity that is a healthy and visible sign to the wider community.

Appendix 1: Some questions for discussion

1. The paper listed some of the positives of 'local'; but what are the downsides? List these in your group. In particular, consider the following:

One of the questions often asked of OLM - and for that matter NSM - ministries is 'how easy is it to be prophetic or to have a critical edge to one's ministry, working as you do in your local/home context?'

When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place, and came to his home town, where he taught the people in their synagogue. In amazement they asked, "Where does he get this wisdom from, and these miraculous powers? is he not the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary, his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters here with us? Where does he get all this from? So they turned against him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet never lacks honour, except in his home town and in his own family". And he did not do many miracles there, such was their want of faith. (Matthew 13, 53-58).

- **What does this passage have to say to us about**
 - **the effectiveness of a permanently rooted local ministry?**
 - **methods of discernment and selection?**

2. The implications for our modes of ministry today of Jesus' ministry and instructions.

Jesus was an itinerant preacher/healer who 'went round all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues', never settling in any one place for very long during his three-year ministry. He eschewed rootedness (and indeed family ties):

A scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go". Jesus replied, "Foxes have their holes and birds their roosts; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another man, one of his disciples, said to him, "Lord, let me go and bury my father first." Jesus replied, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead." (Matthew 8, 19-22).

He instructs his disciples in the value of both 'stopping and staying' -

"Whatever town or village you enter, look for some suitable person in it, and stay with him until you leave" (Matt 10, 11)

"While he was in their company he directed them not to leave Jerusalem. "You must wait," he said, "for the gift promised by the Father of which I told you". (Acts 1, 4)

within the context of an itinerant missionary ministry, one which was, in time, to become even more wide-ranging than his own:

"Go therefore to all nations and make them my disciples." (Matt 28, 19) "and you will bear witness for me in Jerusalem, and throughout all Judaea and Samaria, and even in the farthest corners of the earth" (Acts 1, 8).

- **How, if at all, do these passages affect our thinking about the formulation of patterns of ministry today?**

3. Local and universal – the continual challenge of holding the two in tension

Being 'rooted' need not mean being insular or chauvinistic. Thomas Merton was one figure who came to the Task Group's mind as someone who remained in the same place for 27 years (straying no further than the neighbouring town of Louisville, apart from his final Asian journey), yet throughout the Gethsemane years was intimately linked into a global intellectual and ecumenical network.

- **What are the means which enable a local SEC congregation to remain linked into the church catholic and the global village that is now the world? How can LCM encourage and facilitate such an outward-looking mentality?**

4. Towards a definition of 'local'

A literature search yielded no easy methods of defining 'what is local'. Different disciplines use a variety of parameters: physical, cultural, socio-economic, political, linguistic, racial and so on. However my own training in prehistory reminds me that an archaeological 'culture' – a discrete local entity - is mapped geographically and temporally by the spread of a homogeneous set of artifacts, adverting to particular 'ways of doing things', call that lifestyle, custom, diet or (the all-encompassing term) 'ritual'; outliers of such artifacts within largely different assemblages of tools hint at trade with a neighbouring 'culture'. The description of such 'cultural' (in its archaeological sense, encompassing economic, religious, sociological and political factors) minutiae may be of some help in our debate. Even despite the huge

homogenizing forces that are at play today, it is still possible for inhabitants of local 'cultures' to differentiate their ways of being in subtle ways. The Cornish poet A L Rowse captures this beautifully in his poem 'Cornish Landscape':

*What is there in a Cornish hedge
the broken herring bone pattern of stones,
the gorse, the ragged rick,
the way the little elms are,
sea-bent, sea-shorn
that so affects the heart?*

The organisation *Common Ground* has been doing some groundbreaking work in this field in England and Wales in recent years; here we offer some quotes from a Conference the organisation held in 1993 entitled 'Local Distinctiveness: place, particularity and identity'.⁴⁰

*Local distinctiveness may be described as the sum of the points of connection between the place and the person. It is the things any writer will instinctively smell out and set down. It is a kind of language. It might appear to be an environmental question, but it is quite as much a **psychological one**.*

*Scale is important, as is the question of who defines it. We are talking of a fineness of grain – the neighbourhood, the locality, the parish, the housing estate, the high street, the village, the suburb, perhaps even the street **as defined by those who live and work and play there**. The area to which people feel they belong, and which belongs to them through familiarity or which they have chosen and are claiming anew.*

*Locality needs to be defined from the inside, with a cultural and natural base, less abstraction, more detail. Attempts should not be made to reduce distinctiveness to an essence. It is a compound thing and a messy one as well as being dynamic, **hence its elusiveness. It cannot be summarised**. It may even be variegated within, but have a unity and integrity in the mingling of its parts.*

*Wensleydale cheese: why is it important to makers and gourmets that this cheese continues to be made in this valley and not the next? Amongst the reasons to do with the need for jobs comes also an understanding that cows of this place, eating this grass in this valley, with expertise built up here over generations, combine to create a food which is particular, authentic and good. Its making brings dignity and pride to the place, since the people who make it are experts, the people who grow the grass to feed the cows are implicated in this. **The relationships breed culture and identity which has meaning for the people who live and work here**. If the discussion were about Gevrey Chambertin, Julienas and Fleurie, the inmates would nod knowingly about the discrete charms of the different slopes, soils, sun and seasons; the French have made a profession out of the particular. Appellation contrôlée carries important kudos; identity, place and quality are intimately bound together. The place of origin, the knowledge of derivation is real and important. People can tell the difference.*

- **Given the elusive and mosaic nature of local distinctiveness that these passages detail, the resistance to blanket formulae of description, how is the ambit of 'local' best defined in any context? What factors need to be brought into play? Who best should do the definition?**

⁴⁰ *Local Distinctiveness: place, particularity and identity. Essays for a Conference September 28th 1993. Common Ground (1993)*