**Christian Coalition for Urban Mission**

**Recovering the vision - Looking back to look forward**

**Urban theology, mission and ministry**

**Background briefing**

**Introduction**

In the period between the early 1970’s and the late 1990’s there was a wide ranging discussion of what were the key elements of urban theology and its importance in underpinning urban ministry across the UK and denominations.

Key elements in the development of both the ideas and themes of urban theology include (the list is a snapshot and not in any way definitive):

* The spread of liberation theology and in particular thinking that originated in Latin America
* The creation of specialist units and groups that include:
* The Urban Theology Unit (Sheffield)
* The Evangelical Urban Training Project (now known as UNLOCK)
* The Urban Theology Project (Morden and later St James Piccadilly)
* Urban Mission Training Project
* The work of the William Temple Foundation (Manchester)
* Unlock
* Jesus in the City
* Catholic Asociation for Racial Justice
* Contextual Theology Centre
* The foundation of Church Action on Poverty 1982
* The publication of Faith in the City 1985
* The creation of the Church Urban Fund 1986
* The publication of the Methodist report The Cities 1997
* The publication of Faithful Cities 2005

All of the above played an important part in the wide ranging debate about contributed to the circulation of papers and the organisation of consultations that stimulated both action and reflection.

In addition to the theological reflection it is important to note that the use of social analysis was used to better understand the particular problems and issues that predominated in inner city and other urban communities. The publication of Peter Townsends ‘Poverty in Britain’ in 1980 stimulated a wide ranging debate on poverty and exclusion that challenged the emphasis on free market economics that were the political theme of most politicians of this period.

**Changes in ways of thinking**

The world moves on and the Churches likewise find new ways of exploring mission and ministry. The publication of ‘Mission Shaped Church’ in 2004 was the catalyst for one such shift. The emphasis on ‘New ways of Being Church’ and mission communities, church planting and related models of mission in many ways superseded the thinking on urban mission and theology.

Changes in models of theological education also led to less of an emphasis on urban theology. In the wider Church specialist ministries that focused on social responsibility, industrial mission and the theological links between Church and world were lost through the reduction in budgets at national, regional and diocesan levels.

The changes in the way of delivering ministry by local churches are also encapsulated in the work of the Church Urban Fund. The model of grant making for community projects managed locally is shifting into partnerships with dioceses to create Joint Partnership companies/charities that can identify local funding for work that combats poverty.

The change builds on past experience whilst putting the focus on the local community where poverty is a major problem for individuals and families. The focus being on poverty means that the breadth of communities being served will be wider than the urban but the importance of contextual theological reflection remains an all important element of the developments.

The changes in models of ministry continue to be a part of the life of all churches and this is a natural process of how organisations develop and respond to new ways of working. In the midst of the changes it is important that theological reflection and social analysis is recovered to underpin the work.

In addition the growth on independent Black majority Churches has brought a new approach to both worship and ministry that is rooted in the Pentecostal tradition. In many cases Churches in this tradition are bringing new insights that challenge traditional theological analysis. The forthcoming book ‘*Turning the Tables on Mission’* offers important insights into thinking from this tradition.

The development of Christian based charities working in local communities like ‘The Eden Project’ alongside the well established work of ‘Urban Expressions’ also brings insights that need to be taken into consideration. (Following a conversation with Bridget Cass of the Jerusalem Trust a round table meeting of groups supported by the Trust is a possible way of opening up a conversation).

An important element in taking a programme forward is the recognition that in the context of urban thinking and planning that London faces different challenges to other cities. Its contribution to both the national and global economy means that whilst urban issues must be explored they will require a different approach. A particular issue in London is gentrification across communities that have traditionally been associated with poverty and decline.

The growth of the new media means that communication is often instant and individuals will use twitter to exchange information that moves between simple and the profound, and blogs offer immediate insights into the news and longer more reflective pieces on a wide range of issues.

**The programme**

In the light of the changes that have led to the discussion of urban mission and ministry slipping into the fringes of theological thinking it is important that opportunities are identified to develop new models for the sharing of insights and ideas.

To this end a series of seminar/workshops that brings together representatives of different Christian traditions to explore the distinctive contribution of urban theology. The aim is be to invite well established practitioners to work with a younger group of those involved in urban communities.

The outcome would be a series of working papers that would inform current theological reflection and challenge the wider Church on issues of contextual and practical theology. A key emphasis will be on drawing on individuals with day to day experience of practical ministry.

The seminars/workshops would take place across England and would be based on a full working day with papers being shared and discussed. In addition it is proposed that workshops will be held at the Greenbelt Festival in 2013 and 2014.

**The time table for the seminar workshops:**

September 2013 – September 2014

Writing up of outcomes on going with a final report to be published in early 2015

**Blog**

In addition a dedicated blog would be developed that will be used for the publication of ideas from a single paragraph to longer submissions including book reviews to ensure a wide ranging debate between practitioners and others drawn from the Academy.

The blog will be moderated by an editor(s) who would receive the submissions and ensure that it was maintained and updated. Alongside the Blog

The blog and seminar/workshops could no doubt work without any formal ownership/sponsorship but to assist in taking the process forward I suggest that the Christian Coalition for Urban Mission (CCFUM) and Churches Together in England Urban Mission Consultative Group be partners in the proposal.

**Timing**

A blog to be established and launched in the summer of 2013

**Funding**

A briefing outlining a budget for administrative support is available. It is important to note that the programme will be taken forward not withstanding financial support.

Terry Drummond

Bishop of Southwark’s Adviser on Urban and public Policy

Chair of Churches Together in England Urban Mission Consultative Group

terry.drummond@southwark.anglican.org

terrym.drummond@blueyonder.co.uk

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