

In Conclusion

With regard to both prayer and finance I would suggest that a Boiler Room needs the support of the Church in the City, to enable and encourage the members of congregations to come to pray and pay. A Boiler Room therefore needs to have an image of being a place of prayer in the city, for the city, by the city. If we are perceived to be adding value to the Kingdom of God in the city, we can expect, almost demand, support from the church in the city. That support will be both in pray-ers coming and in finance being forthcoming.

I would suggest that for a Boiler Room to exist in a town or city, that place needs to have a certain minimum Christian population, a church leadership, or at least a church population, which has caught a vision that their city, and nation, can only be transformed through a foundation of prayer.

With regard to Evangelism, if our hearts are right before God, it does appear from our experience that, provided a Boiler Room has certain facilities, the right position, ethos, staffing, etc. and God then, "If we build it, they will come"! A truly spiritual place has an appeal. God is attractive. The Holy Spirit is real.

Self-sustaining Boiler Rooms

The above has huge implications for the proposition of developing Boiler Rooms as self-standing monastic entities.

- Where would the finance come from to sustain them?
- Who would want to support them?
- How would we justify their existence?

We are at a stage when wisdom and experience is at a premium within the movement.

Thank you for reading,

"Malcolm in the Midst!"

Malc Peirce

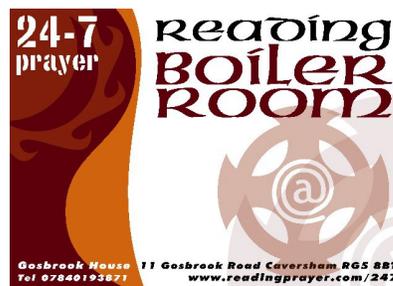
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Urban Monasteries / Friaries

My own take on "Urban Monasteries" is that they would be, first off, "open" communities. Some "monks/friars" might have day jobs. They might take "year outs" or "decade outs" of specific commitment. They would probably remain mixed sex. They might contain married couples. In other words, they would be very different from our traditional view of monks and nuns. I think it is important that we clarify what it is we are proposing that "3rd millennium" monks or friars, monasteries or friaries might be. To set us thinking what they might or might not be

Traditional monasteries were mainly foundations from "mother" abbeys, e.g. Reading from Cluny. They had strict accountability, e.g. Reading under Chichester. There was a definite hierarchy and very strict rules, not least celibacy. They cost huge sums of money raised from ordinary people, many poor!

It seriously worries me that we tend to talk as if we are running when we haven't yet stood up. It sounds as if we have already established "Urban Monasteries", which we are looking to multiply. In fact we have a few experimental loosely structured and fairly fragile entities which are working out what they are and how they are going to function. We mustn't mistake hype for hope.

Reading Boiler Room's experience is that there is a health in going for local accountability to the Church in the City in which the Boiler Room is based. We are currently looking to set up as a Charity in our own right, which would mean we were accountable to a local board of Trustees. As the movement grows there could come a temptation for the "Order" to be centrally supervised with a resultant hierarchy.

I strongly believe that all Boiler Rooms will share similar core values and facets, but that locality will dictate different emphases. Boiler Rooms will have different strengths or giftings which reflect the place in which they are founded and the personalities of those involved.

*you have many teachers,
but few fathers*

Fathers

The 24-7 movement has grown so fast that we are seeing young leaders beginning to burn out. It appears that St. Paul's words were only too true – "You have many teachers, but few fathers". Who are the fathers of the 24-7 movement? Who will help this "young child" to grow?

I love what Floyd McLung has to say "*Leadership in God's kingdom is influence through serving. Investing in a person's life by imparting values and then helping them cultivate and nurture these values is at the heart of raising up a spiritual family, of being a missional community. If 24-7 is to be a movement with a lasting impact, it will take 4-5 generations of spiritual sons and daughters to turn it into a movement. One generation of leaders a movement is not.*"

We need to learn from the mistakes of the past, if we possibly can, and older heads often carry experience and sometimes wisdom. In ten to twenty years time the young men of today will be the grey hairs, with the wisdom of time and the scars of experience. For now however this still 'toddler' movement could do with dads being around. As a "Caleb" (okay I'm not that old!) I am determined to run with the rising generation, or at least keep up for as long as I can. It grieves me, as it must all of us, to see relatively young adults becoming tired and overstretched.

Of Kings and Things

Reading Abbey to me is a mixed heritage for the Boiler Room. I love the values that we have extracted. However we should remember that monasteries were not 100 per cent wonderful God-given institutions. We tend to have romantic notions of what they stood for and how they lived. At best it was a harsh life for the average monk, a life of late and broken nights, early mornings and no cable TV. We love to think of all the prayer that went up to God, of the alms given to the poor, of the meditation and contemplative lifestyle.

The reality though was that in many ways Reading Abbey was downright parasitic. It cost millions, in today's equivalent, to build and maintain. The very stone was extravagantly quarried and imported from France. Excavations have recently shown that the floor was relaid at least three times over time in ornate mosaic-styled tile. The Abbot lived in conditions fit for a King and was indeed able to entertain Royalty. He was incredibly powerful. The majority of the land in and around Reading was his, or Battle Abbey's. The Abbey sucked the land dry. The townsfolk lived in varying degrees of poverty. Its very foundation was tainted in that the King invested a huge amount in it so as to pay penance for his sins and gain salvation.

The long established Cluniac Benedictine's were none too pleased in due course when the Franciscans arrived! The Abbey, as a closed order wanted little to do with the people of the town except to eat their produce and take their taxes. Franciscans (Grey Friars) were genuinely "missional", an open order, probably pretty evangelical! The arrival of the Franciscans threatened to undermine the perception and role of God, the Church and the Abbey. So the Abbot gave the Friars a small plot of marshy land down by the river. The resulting Friary sank into the ground.

When the Abbey was 'dissolved' few townsfolk would have shed a tear. Those actively fighting for religious freedom would have cheered. We forget our history at our peril. The Reformation was a "Protest" against much that was terribly wrong under Papal rule. Reading Abbey became the King's "Holiday Inn" for a while. Later Cromwell's men showed it no quarter and cannonballs tore it apart, this symbol of papacy. In the years following this edifice became no more than the town's stone quarry. Bits of it can be found in buildings all over Reading. Maybe it was the only way God could "take the Abbey into the City"!

The Civil War, was a religious war. It was a war for the freedom of people to worship God the way they wanted too, without human Mediators, without penances, without indulgencies. I am by nature a pacifist, but I suspect my forebears declared for Parliament! We come full circle to the House Church movement again! A rejection of religiosity, of pomp, of ceremony, of 'irrelevant' religious acts. Many people during the Cromwellian era left the parish churches, since if "the earth was the Lord's and the fullness thereof" it was tantamount to sin to try to worship him in buildings full of statues and idolatrous images. If "the temple curtain had been torn in two", it was wrong to have an altar and a priest between you and your God. This was the result of the scriptures coming into print so that any man could read their teachings. The "Church" had lost its grip on the people.

However both the Abbey and the Friary serve to show us that a monastic community seeks to affect the world around it whilst not seeking to grow by addition in the way that a "Church" would expect to do. In short, a monastery does not function as a "Church". But no-one would deny they are a "Community"! Membership of the Community was restricted and the vows acted as a filter of a novice's determination to follow Christ in a very specific way.

the core values of 24-7 are negotiable

Values

"The difference between a vision dreamed and a vision fulfilled is a well worked through set of core values that are lived and taught and made central to the vision of the community." (3)

I pretty much go along completely with all that Floyd McLung says about values. He sums up very well the need for both vision and values. However he states that, "*The core values of 24-7 are our non-negotiables*" (3). That's an interesting statement both because if it were true then we would have sadly set out in the beginning to produce no more than a fossil, or rather God would now be guilty of having led us 'by accident' to create one! In fact of course it isn't true since the values have changed (remember "raw and subversive"?) since the beginning and will continue to evolve. So although it is a direct contradiction I have to suggest that the core values of 24-7 are negotiable.

In the case of the Boiler Rooms, Reading set out with five values and now has six. We took from the Benedictine heritage which included "Serving the Poor". That quickly proved inadequate and evolved into two streams of Poverty and Justice issues. The monks in Reading would not have recognised "Justice" at all as part of their calling. Indeed they were content to exclude non-vowed from their monastery and it appears, even segregate the standing poor from seated rich in the church outside. Increasingly we are looking to the Franciscans as an open order model.

I am so thankful that we are value-based; that we have not tried to be a church, but rather have endeavoured to live out Christ from a foundation of prayer.

Urban Friars - of rings and things

When I heard of "The Order of the Mustard Seed" (5) I was reminded that when Penny and I were married we exchanged rings on the inside of which we had engraved "*God First*". It expressed our desire that within the covenant we were making there was a higher overarching covenant with God. In 2002 we celebrated our 30th Wedding anniversary and such is the effect of middle age we both had outgrown our rings. We chose new matching rings, Celtic in design of course(!) and in a ceremony conducted in the Boiler Room we renewed our vows.

As I said at the outset, as a couple we have seen new ideas come and go, ministries rise and fall, and once influential leaders disappear into oblivion, often in disillusionment, burnout, even bitterness. Some I have seen lose their faith altogether in the process. The early days of the House Church movement was a time when the word Covenant was much in vogue. People committed themselves to each other and submitted their lives to leaders in ways which we would now shy away from. This became known as "heavy shepherding". Many people were deeply hurt as they entrusted decisions to others. It might just be that the "Cymbrogri" concept could go much the same way. Whilst being excited that there might be a wave of greater commitment to the call of God we would voice caution about making covenants for life other than marriage and to God, traditionally symbolized by Baptism.

Phil 2:2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (NRSV)

"Real Monks!"

I was recently recommended a book called "Community and Growth" by Jean Vanier (4). Jean founded a community called l'Arche which is dedicated to the care of those with 'Mental Handicap'. I was much taken with the community because we have a special needs daughter ourselves. The community have given themselves to the fulltime care of those who cannot care for themselves. It is a book I would highly recommend to anyone interested in what a "Monastic style Community" is really like.

I refer to this book as an accessible discussion of what we might be asking of people if we went down the route of making Boiler Rooms into genuine 3rd Millennium Monasteries. I also refer to it because it speaks of the seriousness of making covenant for life and covenant beyond that of marriage and of commitment to Christ, of covenants with others, to a community or movement.

As a taster, or for those who won't buy the book (4), here are some quotes which jumped out at me. I will purposely not comment on them, rather they can speak for themselves.

"To be covenanted to others is to be earthed with them..... If we begin to live in covenant as we enter community, it is sealed at a particular moment, maybe a very solemn one."

"Monastic stability means accepting this particular community, this place and these people, this and no other, as the way to God. (sub quote of Esther de Waal – "Seeking God)"

"There is always a temptation, because of the need for security, to plan a community beforehand, in all its details. Ideas then precede life and want to govern it. But that is not usually the way the spirit works."

"Many want community and a feeling of being together, but refuse the demands of community life. They want both freedom and community; freedom to do just what they want when they want, and community, which implies certain structures and values. It's like wanting the cake and eating it too!"

"From time to time I meet people who want to create a community. After twenty five years' experience I wouldn't advise anyone to do so of their own accord"

"Every community seems to need regular visits from someone who listens and asks the right questions about their life in community, and to whom all its members feel they can talk"

"We are far from the ideal of the Gospel and this causes a latent anguish and guilt which sap our creative energies and can lead to sadness and despair"

"At a time when so many new communities are being born, which are sometimes clamorous in their songs, youth and excitement, we should not forget the old communities, which have worked the earth and lived peacefully, in prayer, silence, worship and forgiveness, and whose traditions go back centuries." (4)

Living in Community – a personal perspective

I will digress for a few paragraphs to describe our personal experience of living in a “community” house, as I believe there are insights to be gained. In 1976 Penny and I bought a house on a joint mortgage shared with another Christian couple, Paul and Janet, from the Baptist “Church” of which we were members. I should say immediately that 25 years or so on we are still the best of friends, indeed they are part of our “personal support group” (*accountability group*). It was the culmination of many hours of thinking and praying. The house was a large three-storey Victorian terraced house. It was a huge step, but we felt it was right. From virtually day one we had lodgers, usually three, for some time another couple lived with us. We were all in our early twenties, freshly Baptized in the Holy Spirit, beginning to operate in the Gifts of the Spirit and wanting to live our lives for God.

We were to learn a lot about living with others, relationships, personal space, caring for single people, protecting marriages, parenting other people’s children and a myriad of other things. At the outset we made some serious and in hindsight, valuable and sensible decisions. Firstly we set a “contract” for four years, with the default that we would sell up and separate. Making a relatively short-term commitment gave us the security to go for it unreservedly, knowing that there was an end in sight if we needed it. We moved in with just one child, ours. By the time we parted four years later there were five children and a sixth on the way. We had indeed outgrown community!

*when i hear people talking or writing enthusiastically about
“missional community” i find myself asking,
“have you any idea what you are proposing?”.*

Each couple had their own bedroom. We had a child’s bedroom. Two other rooms provided accommodation for three lodgers, one room being set up as a bed-sit. We all shared a lounge, playroom, bathroom and kitchen. We divided the kitchen into two mirrored copies so that each couple (in reality guys, the girls!) had their own cooking space. We cooked communally, the girls taking it in turns to cook first course and second course. This provided the first real benefit of communal life, a healthy competitiveness ever striving for greater culinary excellence! Housework was rota’d. Other domestic arrangements were worked out as we went along.

Both couples agree that we would never actively encourage people to live in a “community” situation as it does put huge stresses on relationships. Many readers will have shared student accommodation and be, probably painfully, aware of what I am talking about. Forget married couple’s quarrels over where to squeeze the toothpaste tube, this is something else! Things like dress code, keeping bedroom doors closed, locking the bathroom door, someone else eating the last piece of cake I was saving for later, someone else’s baby throwing up over our settee!

Seriously though, as in marriage, there has to be a lot of give and take, coping with each other’s little foibles. It is only too easy for relationships to go sour or get complicated when living for a long period together.

So when I hear people talking or writing enthusiastically about “missional community” I find myself asking, “Have you any idea what you are proposing?”.

Community

We use the word community to cover many different aspects of society. Examples are the "local community", the "school community", the "business community", a "monastic community". One can also speak of "living in community", which in itself can have a variety of meanings describing people living together in different degrees of mutual dependency and sharing of accommodation, wealth and possessions. If we look at the scriptures we have something of a problem since the word does not occur that often, if indeed at all. In the old and new testaments the writers tend to use the term "brethren". Sexist I know, but there we are! Where it does it refers to the people of a whole locality it refers to (*brothers - brethren*) as in *Deut 15:7*

*If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your **community** (brothers) in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour. (NRSV) or John 21:23 So the rumor spread in the **community** that this disciple would not die. (NRSV)*

which seems to refer to the whole community 'of God', sistern(!) and all, as does :-

*Acts:6:2 And the twelve called together the whole **community** of the disciples*

*Acts: 6:5 What they said pleased the whole **community**, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (NRSV)*

This has value for our understanding in that the disciples were clearly not being dictatorial in their leadership, but shared what they believed God was saying and opened it to democratic approval. There is clear suggestion that meals were at least sometimes shared, but no strong evidence that people were living together other than as extended families as was the tradition.

*Ephesians:6:23 Peace be to the whole **community**, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. (NRSV)*

Again a reference to the whole community of believers (all the brethren), reflecting the biblical view of each place having only the one church, with no place for denominational gatherings calling themselves churches.

We can cheat a bit by using **The Message** which does employ the word community as in *Phil 2:1 If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a **community** (koinonia - fellowship) of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care-then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. (The Message)*

Similarly Peterson says through *James 3:18* that "*You can develop a healthy, robust **community** that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.*" (The Message)

That is a very simple exhortation to live in community in a general sense of "fellowship" not shared household. It still doesn't justify separating out a particular group into what we today might mean when referring to "living in community" or "being a community". A good pastor friend of mine commented something to the effect that "monasteries cannot be found in the New Testament, but then neither can light bulbs and I don't think God has a problem with light bulbs."

Missional Communities?

Prayer will motivate people to mission, to become 'the answers to their own prayers' You can't lay on the floor of a nice warm prayer room in the middle of winter and not be moved with compassion for those living on the street outside. I would propose that straight away we abandon any concept of a Boiler Room being "a Church".

That said, it doesn't preclude it from being a "Community". I would offer the premise that "Monasteries, Abbeys, Nunneries and Friaries, etc. are communities at a level that "churches" rarely if ever achieve. Confused?

Quoting Floyd again,

"To gather is to be community, to be connected in heart and mind. To gather is to build deep friendships, invest in one another's lives, and grow together in grace and obedience to Christ's commands."(3)

That can be true, but you don't have to "gather" as a "church congregation" to be a community! We are in great danger of confusing our terminology. So far Reading Boiler Room has not been a place of "gathering" in the sense of "congregation". We have generally continued the 24-7 model of prayer. At times when "gatherings" occurred they were by groups coming in from a congregation or a "meeting" run by the 'Church in Reading' in one way shape or form. We have however been "community" in a variety of ways.

- The Core Team and staff in work and prayer
- The Geese in sharing a "big brother house"
- The casual friendships and deeper friendships across congregations
- Those rejected by "church" who found a different spirit, of acceptance, not control
- Those not yet believing who "felt God there" and found a place of safety and trust

As I have read and listened to what is being said about "The Order of the Mustard Seed" I have at one and the same time felt an excitement and a concern. 24-7 has developed very quickly in its short few years, from Prayer rooms, to Mission teams, to Boiler Rooms and soon it seems to an order of Friars. Is it the right step? Is it a step to far or at least too soon?

***a monastic community seeks
to affect the world around it
whilst not seeking to grow by addition***

Two related things seem to be being proposed. The one is the 'Missional Community' which would have residents and to one degree or another train and send people out. The other appears to be an order to which anyone can sign up irrespective of denomination or primary church allegiance. It would be something which operated at a different level to "local church".

Of the latter I have insufficient information thus far to comment at length, but have two major concerns from what I have heard. First for those people who finding it hard to commit to a local congregation excuse themselves from any accountability by saying that they owe allegiance to the order. The second reservation has to be that such an apparently secret order could so easily corrupt over time into something completely unintended now. What I can comment on with more understanding and experience is the "Missional Community" aspect.

Evangelism?

Penny and I had worked among the young people in the Forbury Gardens for a number of years before God gave us the Forbury Vaults in 2001. The proximity of the building, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and our acceptance of these young people despite their dress, lifestyle and colourful language, led to the results which we saw. Many Christians of course struggled with seeing and hearing them in a House of Prayer on the lines of "You have turned it into a den of !"

Our experience has been that the Boiler Room became what I would describe as a "*Harvesting Machine*". God was able to attract, affect and change people's lives through the building and the community in and around it. For once "Church" became accessible theoretically 24-7 rather than church doors being closed most of the time. Some of those people became Christians.

Discipling them was an issue. Most joined local churches. The effect of that was to raise our esteem in the eyes of local pastors! We were seen to not be grasping hold of these new Christians but passing them on to local congregations who could nurture and grow them. Pastors loved that! We were seen and are still seen as a 'good thing' because of that. Support from congregations has increased over time, and is still increasing, perhaps because of that. We are seen to represent the whole church, not to be doing our own thing. It is here primarily that I believe Floyd McLung to be so mistaken in his arguments.

Finance

Reading Boiler Room has always struggled. Every so many months we would have a crisis meeting in which the team discussed having to close since we could not cover utilities bills. Salaries have always been a bone of contention since over the first year we tried to pay staff salaries that reflected, as best we could, commercial rates. We took the unusual decision to pay according to need rather than by job description. People outside usually expressed surprise at how much it cost per month to sustain the Boiler Room and even now few people know the actual cost. Despite there being no rent to pay it was still touch and go. Our bottom line was that most support came from individuals and only a little from local churches.

*Reading ABBey's GRAVE ERROR WAS
to expect the city to BE there for it
not it for the city*

What size and nature does a City need to be to sustain a Boiler Room?

In all that I have read and listened to about Boiler Rooms I have never noticed this question being addressed by anyone.

What few people will know is just how difficult it has been to keep Reading Boiler Room afloat. The things which are generally written and spoken are for obvious reasons all very positive and the underlying realities are left unspoken.

*the people who sustained the prayer
came of course from congregations
in and around the town*

Reading was once allegedly said by George Otis Jr. to be the City in the U.K. most likely to see transformation. Whether he ever said that is in dispute, but the reason given, why he thought that, was the size of the Christian population in the town. We apparently have an above average per capita born-again population. How much above I do not know, neither how that was calculated. But it could account for the support we have had.

I would suggest that for a Boiler Room to survive there needs to be a certain, as it were, "critical mass" of people with a heart to pray. I was tempted to say "or a lunatic few on a suicide mission!" but that would not square with what I am arguing.

24-7-365?

We've run under the banner of 24-7-365, however it is a sobering fact that after the first couple of months 24-7 prayer stopped at Reading Boiler Room and we had to look at models described as "Patterns of Prayer" or "Rhythms of Prayer" which were sustainable. Night-time prayer occurred once a week, thanks to the University students, plus very occasional other sessions or part sessions.

My estimate would be that we had active prayer happening for probably 10, maybe a little more, hours per day on average. At times that would be several people in different rooms of the building. Lunchtime was always popular. We did not keep any statistics on that so the point may be debated. The people who sustained the prayer came of course from congregations in and around the town, boosted by pilgrims, staff and 'Geese' (year-outers, for those not with the jargon).

*the boiler room became what i would describe as
a "harvesting machine"*

If we begin to use Boiler Rooms as a form of church plant in their own right we risk destroying their very purpose in being. To me the primary function of a Boiler Room is to take 24-7 prayer to the next level by providing a "House of Prayer" for the City, Nation, Continent and the World.

In the words of a local pastor, having read a draft of this, *"I would add 'not unity as in denominational mergers' because I believe most church leaders sigh with relief when they can do something genuinely spiritually unifying without having to consider the church-political ramifications; hence the strength of Boiler Room 1"*

I would like to offer a living example of why I believe a Boiler Room would not work if it was a "church" in its own right.

a boiler room as a congregation is a contradiction

Can a Boiler Room be a Church?

Charisma Center Stockholm, a small "case study".

My Swedish friends may have a fuller and more accurate account to offer, but this is what I have been led to understand.

Some years ago the Stockholm City Council met with major church leaders to offer them a partnership in the central Stockholm theatre and arts centre. It was proposed that the 'churches' provide a spiritual input. What was a possibility was a café and a prayer room, an arts workshop, in fact a variety of possibilities to be explored. In the course of preliminary discussions the question was asked, "If people become Christians in this new place, which church would they go to?" The pastors could not come to agreement on that and so could not pursue the matter. Inevitably the whole plan fell through.

Some of the more enthusiastic younger church leaders were so appalled at this that they decided to go it alone with a vision for 24 hour church to include a prayer room, drop-in etc. This has come about. People left existing congregations to pursue this new vision. The building is known as "The Dream Centre" and the 'church' is called "Charisma". So we now have something which looks pretty much like a Boiler Room, but it is a "church" (congregation). No-one from other congregations goes there to pray. The other churches despise it for having its roots in discontent and independence. They in turn don't think too highly of the other leaders for their disunity and failure to grasp such a wonderful opportunity. They have grown into a large, active, predominantly young, and flourishing "church".

Despite the positive aspects and the zeal of its founders, I see Charisma both as an opportunity missed and a warning to us.

- A Boiler Room as a congregation is a contradiction.
- A Boiler Room which does not value and actively work for unity among churches is failing in part of its purpose.
- A Boiler Room which sets itself apart from the Church in the City is destined to fail.
- A Boiler Room planted where the Church is not calling for it in some way shape or form will not flourish since the Church will not water it!
- Where there is pastoral disunity it will be hard for a Boiler Room to survive

Church plant – some challenges.

I need to pick up on something which Floyd Mclung says, "*we could mistakenly give away our spiritual children by encouraging them to join existing local churches.*" (3) This is a very telling point. Floyd is coming at the subject from an experience of a para-church evangelism organization. He is rightly seeing that YWAM can be so much more successful if prayer is given a greater place. However I believe that to view Boiler Rooms as church plants is a grave error.

Over the two years and more of the Reading Boiler Room, we saw a number of young people become Christians. We took initial responsibility for them, tried forming a cell, ran the odd "gathering" but most in due course joined local churches through friends they made at the Boiler Room. Possibly the major reason Reading Boiler Room worked was that Reading has a high level of unity among the pastors and has had so for about seven years, much due to Ed Silviso by the way. They in turn were approving, supportive (some financially so) of the Boiler Room since they saw it as part of the fabric of the "One Church in Reading", trusted that "their people" would benefit from coming and crucially, that we were not a church plant likely to "steal their sheep".

We had long discussions as to whether we could start a church "alongside" the Boiler Room. Permissions were sought of 24-7 National and of the local pastors in Reading. Both seemed happy with the proposal that Penny and I pastor such a "church". However as we talked through the implications we concluded that we'd probably have to find other premises to "do church" in, so as to not have the effect I've outlined above. But in planting a church some people would have come to us from "local churches" and the damage would be done. Pastors would discourage their flocks from coming to the Boiler Room, prayer and financial support would decline.

pastors would discourage their flocks from coming to the Boiler room, prayer and financial support would decline.

In respect of prayer and other "Christian" gatherings within the building, the Boiler Room has to be considered to be part of the Church in Reading, if only because we are acknowledged as existing by local churches and church leaders. The use of the building by various groups, such as youth leaders and Kidzchurch validates us as part of the wider church. However do we qualify as a "church" in the sense of a local congregation?

Unity

Floyd writes: "*Unity is not the ultimate goal of a missional community. Attempting to build unity with local churches can actually hinder true unity.*" (3)

Unity may not be the ultimate goal, but to not actively work toward unity is unbiblical and for us not an option.

- "... that they may be one"
- "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" "
- "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples" "

A Boiler Room is totally about unity. Not unity of doctrine and belief, since you can't get that along one pew! But unity in the spirit, as in Jesus' "That they may be one, even as we are one" and Paul's "bearing with one another, make every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). A Boiler Room has to be open to all, it is in the city, for the city, by the city in the sense of being in the church, for the church, by the church.

“one church – many congregations”

Church?

Personally I have come to the conclusion that Boiler Rooms have to be accepted as “church” (Ekklesia) since, where two or three Christians gather (Ekklesia?) He has promised to be “in the midst”. However that does not make us “A Church”. In my current thinking there can be no such thing as a “local church” although there can be “church in a locality”. A group of people who gather (Ekklesia) together in a structured way and with a purpose, to me is a congregation which is in turn part of the church in the town or city. I am amused, if not incensed, when I hear pastors/leaders speak of “my church” and “my people”, as if they owned them.

I understand scripture to indicate that The Church, as the Bride of Christ, is One Body, universal, including both living and dead saints (believers). That is to say that there is only the “One Holy and Apostolic Church” which encompasses all believers alive on this planet. That said, the book of Revelation tells us that each City has a Church, as in “To the Angel of the Church in write”. John says Church not “churches”.

We might speculate that God sees ‘Church’ in a Continent and maybe ‘Church’ in a National sense. However increasingly we are seeing that the old concept of a Church as a group of people with shared(ish) beliefs that meet in a specific building, in an area of town, possibly even commuting for miles, is not a New Testament view of Church, albeit that it qualifies as a congregation or gathering.

If anyone has followed the progression of teaching from the likes of Ed Siloso you will be aware of the changing mindset toward “One Church – Many Congregations” (www.readingchurches.org.uk). The train of thought leads to City Eldership across gathered congregations and spheres of influence such as council, businesses, the health service etc. In fact in other cultures and languages the confusion about the word “church” does not exist at all, as say in Portuguese there is a different word for church in the sense of the building to the one used for the people (congregation) and another for the Church in the sense of the wider people of God.

***I would propose that straight away we abandon any concept of a
Boiler Room being “a church”***

Andrew Jones refers to people today “*experiencing church in a modular rather than singular fashion*”. (2) That is exactly what regulars at the Boiler Room have been demonstrating - perhaps ‘church’ on Sunday, maybe a bit of ‘God Channel’, a couple of visits to the Boiler Room, discussions with people from other churches, a CD, a tape, an exchange on MSN or by email, time spent on the wailing wall, chatroom, etc.

It is no longer adequate to think of one place or group of people as fulfilling all of a person’s spiritual needs in the way perhaps “chapel” once did. I have for a long time now been speaking of every person having their own individual, personalised church, they may share some elements in common with others around them but their church is individual to them. The Boiler Room feels a little like a ‘supermarket church’ – open all hours, self-service, pick and mix – but definitely only a part of a person’s church experience. It is just that availability which is attractive to unchurched people. Boiler Rooms are definitely a seeker-friendly environment!

***we are seen to represent the whole church,
not to be doing our own thing***

Prayer Rooms

it's the shekinah glory

"Draw close to God and He will draw close to you."

We do well to remember that 24-7 was and is first and foremost about prayer. It's success I would suggest is down to two main things. Firstly it was God inspired and we owe a debt to Pete Greig and others for listening and responding to God and for praying and inspiring others to pray. Secondly Father, Holy Spirit and Jesus responded heart to heart with the hundreds, now thousands, who set aside serious time, often when they could have been sleeping or out clubbing or whatever, to draw near to Him.

Boiler Rooms as Prayer Rooms

It will have come as no surprise that when Reading opened an ongoing 24-7 prayer room, God seemed to be pleased. One pastor said to me "It's the presence of God. I can't keep my people away." An elderly intercessor smiled and said, "It's wonderful, it's the Shekinah Glory. He's here." Many times people commented on the way the air felt "thicker" or "heavier" in one prayer room or another. There was even one particular spot in our "Nations Prayer Room" which would often instantly cause me to do that bend over and nod thing which some are accustomed to, even when if I wasn't actually in there to pray.

A Youth movement?

We like to think of 24-7 as a youth prayer movement. However Reading would never have survived if it wasn't for the fact that it quickly attracted pray-ers of all ages. Those who one might call "serious intercessors" were drawn to it and made what we were more sustainable. It made us more valued by the church.

Prayer or "Intercession"

I will only flag up here that I am not unaware that many would say that there are levels of prayer – "ongoing", "strategic", "intercessory", "prophetic". Here is not the time or place to get into that, but it needed mentioning. We have all experienced a 24-7 prayer room beginning to hear from God prophetically. Sometimes He has given an individual or a group of people some direction for themselves, their City or their congregation. Boiler Rooms undeniably take 24-7 prayer to a deeper level because of sustained prayer. It does mean that we need to begin to be more responsible for what people think God may be saying. In Reading we began to get more interested in "spiritual mapping", etc. If we pray, will God speak? When He speaks, does he expect us to listen and act? If He speaks about the City, the Church or the Nation, where do we go with that.

I do believe that Boiler Rooms have a role in corporately "standing in the gap" for their town, city, nation, etc. The challenge is how we integrate our "standing" with others called do the same in different ways. Where, as in Reading, a Network of Pastors have established Prayer and intercessory meetings and networks; where there is an appointed prayer co-ordinator, there are challenges in linking together the various elements. In Reading we have developed links with prayer leaders and ministries, with for example "Sowing Seeds" and "Connect UK/Europe" and with visits to the Northumberland Community, among others. We have actively supported and encouraged those elsewhere in establishing Boiler Rooms for their cities and nations.

Reading Boiler Room

I can safely say that the Reading Boiler Room evolved through a process of “wishing”, “dreaming”, “doing”, “being”, “praying”, “debating” and “weeping”! It has not been an easy journey. We have been conscious that we were part of a defining process. Living it, not talking or writing about it. People were able to come and see what God had done. Now I hear new terms such as “missional communities” and wonder what on earth they are! Is this thinking coming out of Boiler Room or being overlaid on it?

Over the two years and a bit that Reading Boiler Room 1 existed there was an ongoing discussion of a number of topics

- Was it church?
- Were we planting church?
- What did we do with those who came to faith?
- What would we do with those who came to us and stopped attending other “churches”?
- Did team members have to belong to local “churches”?
- Was it a community?
- What is community?
- Was it primarily a prayer room or a youth drop-in?
- Was it a place for contemplation or evangelism?

First some scriptures, then a little introductory overview.

1 Cor 12:12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (NRSV)

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Eph 1:22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Background

As a founding member of the core team of Reading Boiler Room I have been involved with 24-7 here from the beginning. As a Christian of some 40+ years I have seen new ideas come and go, ministries rise, and once influential leaders disappear into oblivion, often in disillusionment, burnout, even bitterness. Some I have seen lose their faith altogether in the process.

My wife Penny and I come from a mixed denominational background. I was born into a Salvationist family, had a "brush" with Methodism and an Independent Free Church. Penny spent her early teens in the Anglican Church. We were married in Elim, spent some years in the Apostolic Church (Pentecostal). In our mid twenties Penny and I left our local Baptist Church to start a "House Church" in a shared community house, where we could express a new freedom in worship, prayer, depth of fellowship and exercise the gifts of the Spirit unhindered by tradition and learn how to live in a community over a period of four years. We have tracked the "decline" or at least "development" of the House Church movement and its transformation into effectively 'just another denomination'. I would venture to suggest that much of the current debate within 24-7 has large amounts of the same "feel" and "issues" that the emergent House-Church movement faced. Were they truly churches? (Most used the term fellowship in an attempt to avoid the question).

Many of our contemporaries have however continued to pioneer and fight the temptation to compromise and settle down. For my own part, there has been a continual challenge to concepts of church. Over the past decade I have been led to mix with intercessors and prayer leaders, and had the privilege to travel with prophetic men and women and more recently some younger prayer leaders/visionaries. In the process, God has placed on my heart not just a passion for the rising generation but a desire to see Europe evangelized. More specifically still, to see Germany and Sweden released in prayer and mission.

My wife (Penny of Chapter 19 fame! – Red Moon Rising*) and I parented the work among the young 'Skaters', 'Moshers' and 'Goths' in Reading town centre. Thus for us the coming together of prayer and youth in 24-7 has been a natural process. God gave us the vision and home for Reading Boiler Room at just the right time. It was an organic thing, the response of a small group of people, having found something of God in 24-7 prayer, wanting more of him.

Penny has worked in Social Services, the Health Service, the Youth Service and in the Commercial Sector. My background is a mix of office administration and education, having taught for seventeen years. We have three adult children although the youngest lives at home. We now foster through a national agency, having spent three years with "CARE Remand" fostering young men on remand arrested for criminal activity or alleged crime.

"clearing up sarah's vomit a few minutes later penny reflected that this was not quite what any of them had anticipated when they first imagined a 24-7 house of prayer"

Red Moon Rising – Pete Greig 2004 (1)

By the way, for readers of 'Red Moon Rising', we can vouch that what is described in Chapter 19 as having happened at Reading Boiler Room pretty much did happen. In the words of the late Eric Morcambe "All the right notes, not necessarily in the right order." The thought that Pete Greig had climbed into my wife's brain momentarily was at first reading a little disturbing! But, seriously, Pete has written a wonderful account in a way which none of us could possibly have done, interweaving disparate events into a superb prose which captures the heart of those days. In one sense the following pages add a little more insight into what lies behind that chapter.

Boiler Rooms - An alternative view

Preface

As I set out to commit my thoughts to paper I realize that only a few people will even know who I am, let alone why I should feel that I have anything to offer worth reading. However having lived with a Boiler Room for three years now I hope you will indulge me in sharing a few insights.

I write just after the 2004 Roundtable in Barcelona and having not attended feel perhaps that I missed a significant weekend, since people have passed me copies of papers, sent me emails, telephoned and "skyped" me. For the reader's sake I have endeavoured to be brief and you will have to read between the lines a great deal to make sense of some of my fairly skeletal paragraphs. If anyone wants me to expand any points, or challenge my thinking, then just email me on malc@readingprayer.com

Malc Peirce - October 2004

*i have seen new ideas come and go, ministries rise,
and once influential leaders disappear into oblivion,
often in disillusionment, burnout, even bitterness*

Introduction

In the following pages I hope in a very modest way to address a number of major challenges currently facing the 24-7 prayer movement. In particular Boiler Rooms and the questions of church-planting and monastic vow and order.

I have read with more than a passing interest the present round of articles by various people. This piece is primarily prompted by "Principles and Practices of Church Planting" (Floyd McClung). Where I have quoted from books or papers I have used a blue font. I also include a measure of response to Pete Greig's proposals regarding the "Order of the Mustard Seed", as far as I have understood what is being said.

Throughout I will generally use the word congregation rather than church when referring to a locally based gathering of God's people under a name and with a pastor, pastoral team or leadership of some sort. I will attempt to articulate why I do not believe that Boiler Rooms can or should be "churches" or "congregations" and look at some of the challenges related to the monastic vision.

I hope that you will find this at least thought-provoking. I am fully expecting that people will beg to differ with my stance and also am fully aware that five years from now I will read this and have questions myself! I feel some responsibility toward all those who have caught the vision for Boiler Rooms, since if we had not pressed in and pushed through (to use the jargon!) others might never have even begun to dream of creating Boiler Rooms. If history recalls that this was a brief and passing phase, or worse still does not recall it at all, then I hope we can be forgiven for raising false hopes and expectations, of making it sound feasible when it wasn't.

Boiler Rooms

A Personal Perspective

Malc Peirce

Reading Boiler Room

The following document in no way represents a consensus view held by the Core Team of
Reading Boiler Room

It is what it says, a personal perspective

October 2004