

Cyril Summers 1920-1998

Some of this material is from Cyril's Book

'A People's Pilgrimage - The Community House Story So Far'

"My call to the ministry in 1938 had less to do with preaching than with new and radical ways of service to the underprivileged, whose lack of political power was of growing concern to me. I became more critical of the church's obsession with the past, and her isolation from the poor and their cry for social justice. The Church's support of the armed conflict in 1939 widened still further the divisions between us. In October 1938, when I could no longer resist God's call to the Christian Ministry, I passed through one of those experiences that sets one's life in a new direction. It was as though God was offering me a total package. If I was to become his servant and friend, I would have to renounce violence and accept the way of love. I could not pick and choose. There could be no compromise. I could accept or reject the offer. Unknowingly, I had become a pacifist."

Cyril and Dorothy both worked with the poor and homeless in Liverpool during the war and got married during that time. His description, in his book, of the lives of the people he worked with are harrowing. He was incensed with the way in which the Church turned a blind eye to this poverty and deprivation.

Cyril became the minister for Community House in 1954, moving, with Dorothy and his two young children, Andrew and Valerie, into the manse next door.

The church building, then called Corporation Road Presbyterian Church, was already in trouble but in 1961 with the report from the surveyors W.S. Atkins and partners, it was obvious that the church was unsafe and must come down. (See story of the church demolition.)

In order to understand how Cyril saw Community House, and his mission as minister of it, read his words for a Pageant that was produced in 1964, which depicted a press reporter receiving answers in song and sketches to his questions about the building plans.

"This is the craziest report I have ever written. First, I find a Church, but no building, and this frankly, I found baffling, and you proceed to tell me that the Church is a fellowship, a reconciling power, a body of Compassion, a witness to all that Jesus came to teach. It isn't a building at all. Fine. It's difficult, but I think I can understand it. But now what happens? You start talking about building again. Is the Church a building, or isn't it?"

The narrator replies.

"This is the story of a people without a House of God,
A people without a home.
Who, being homeless
Began to build a home,
Not for themselves,
But for all who are homeless.

All communities need a centre,
A place of meeting,
A focus,
A meeting point.

The need is not only for the teenagers and the elderly,
But for all the people in the community.
The harassed mother wants to leave her child while she shops.
Parents need guidance,
Denominations come together,
Children at leisure can learn and play together;
Social and voluntary societies are often homeless.
The work of Christian education needs a centre for the distribution of aids in Christian work.
Some people need a quiet place to come and pray.

**All communities need a centre,
A place of meeting.
And supposing it were a centre of compassion,
A centre of understanding,
A place of reconciliation,
A refuge of comfort,
A centre of happiness,
A place where people are always treated as people,
Supposing, in fact, it were a centre of Christian life and witness."**

Cyril worked as a Labour Councillor for many years. When he was Mayor of Newport (1984-1985) he set up a Peace Committee and would not take part in any military processions, such as on Armistice Day.

He set up a twinning with Kutaisi in Georgia, which is now over thirty years old. Cyril and Dorothy went to Georgia as part of the original delegation.

He also visited Hiroshima on a peace Mission, when mayors from all over the world were invited to an event.

When Cyril retired from the ministry he still supported the work of Community House, attending the church as a member, until he died in 1998.