

### Chairman's Message for APCMH Newsletter - September 2000

*We are pilgrims on a journey, We are brothers on the road;*

*We are here to help each other Walk the mile and bear the load.*

I was recently reminded of this verse from the Servant Song. I was taking part in a local "Pilgrimage Walk". In six groups of twos and threes we set out from the Cellar, a Christian coffee bar in Godalming, to visit a total of 44 places of worship within a 4-mile radius. Each group visited about 8 places and walked about 10 miles or so. We were celebrating the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday of the Cellar and the "pilgrimage" was intended to be a symbolic act of unity. There was a great deal of organisation and preparation – advertising for walkers, getting maps, planning routes, deciding on the places to be visited, clothes, boots, sandwiches, water, and the Baptist pastor to send us on our way with prayers. It struck me how strange it was that there was such a good feeling of fellowship, challenge and achievement – even though there was no necessity and, some would say, no point in what we were doing. But the significance for me was not so much in the achievement or the destination but in the experience of the "journey" – being with each other, the common struggle, the beauty of God's creation, the muddy path, the helping hand, the lost way, the unexpected guide who helped set us right again and, of course, the welcoming pub when we were tired, hungry and thirsty. It was a wonderful day!

As an Association we are also on a journey. We try to set our sights on where we want to go and we spend a considerable amount of time planning how to get there. But there are many diversions, obstacles and unexpected hazards on the way. Our route may not be as straightforward as we had hoped. We may get side-tracked or temporarily lose our way. But hopefully we go in the right general direction and arrive at the intended destination sooner or later. And, as with the Pilgrimage Walk, it is not only the destination but the journey that is important. As we move along we enjoy each other's company, share set-backs and achievements and, I believe, see a growing band of fellow pilgrims.

And we now have:

- A new leaflet hot off the press;
- A web-site that is up and running though still in its infancy;
- A growing number of resource sheets that can be (or will be) accessed from the web-site;
- A newly formed company which will take over the work of APCMH on 1<sup>st</sup> October;
- An effective affiliation agreement for new groups supporting our aims;
- Carole Allen who has become our new administration assistant;
- A members' day on 4<sup>th</sup> November at All Saints Church, Battersea for members, supporters and guests at which Canon John Foskett will speak on the subject of "Being Alongside" and Andrew Wilson, who is the chaplain at the Bethlem Royal Hospital and works closely with the Croydon Branch of APCMH, will lead a short act of worship and dedication of the work of our new company to God.

Our next main objectives will be to increase our network of supporters and build up our resource material. We will also have to think of ways to increase APCMH's income which, apart from the income restricted to the use of particular branches, is currently only about £3000 a year.

But, whatever our objectives, I hope that we will not lose sight of the importance of the journey itself – not only as we work to improve the Association but also with those we meet in our everyday lives. Another verse from the Servant Song reminds me:

*I will weep when you are weeping, When you laugh I'll laugh with you;*

*I will share your joy and sorrow Till we've seen this journey through.*

John Vallat September 2000