

Sylvia Kenyon – transcription of audio clips

1 Chandler's Ford Chapel

The connection with the chapel in Chandler's Ford really continued very much. I'd got one particular friend with whom I joined in lots of activities; guides, Sunday school, going to Church and I became a primary Sunday school helper just before the age of 14. There was the idea that you would give yourself towards becoming a Christian. We used to have something called young people's Sunday and they always had a special speaker who came and gave really quite an evangelical message and quite often asked people to come up to the front if they wanted to give their lives to Jesus. So I was certainly beginning to think quite seriously about those sorts of things.

Did you go to the front?

I did on one occasion certainly, yes. At least one occasion.

Can you remember how that happened? What the message was?

I can't remember all the words but it was an accumulative message. I do remember one book that was given as a Sunday school prize which was called 'A peek behind the scenes'. And it was about a girl in a circus I think. She had been very influenced by the story of the good shepherd in Luke chapter 15 and I remember being very impressed by that. By this time when my friend and I were 17, she was going to become a nurse and was going to go away to London to train as a nurse so before we went we both became Church members together.

2 Becoming a Social Worker

I decided I was going to go into social work. I've always felt in way that I was guided in this way because I started thinking about what was then called an almoner which was social work in hospitals. I don't know which came first; I think it was a talk by an old girl of the school. She gave a talk about her work as an almoner and I became very interested in this. And then our neighbour's son in law produced literature, leaflets about becoming an almoner. So that was how that idea developed in my mind and as I say I've always felt in a way that that was what I was led to.

So then you went to university?

Mmm. I went to London to the LSE and studied sociology. I was able to get a place in one of the Halls of Residence, so I met a tremendous variety of people. A very large number of the people were overseas students so this was the first time really that I met a large number of people from all sorts of different parts of the world which I found, you know, tremendously enlarging.

So where did you go to church?

Hinde Street Methodist church. We used to meet on a Sunday afternoon and there would be at least 200 people probably from all over London. Either you could stay to the service at Hinde Street or people would go off to services elsewhere. I mean I used to go because the Hall of Residence was in Holborn, so I used to go, and sometimes on a Sunday morning as well, to Kingsway Hall to hear Dr Donald Soper. And we went on other times to hear Dr Leslie Weatherhead at City Temple.

So how did your faith change at that time?

As a student you have all sorts of different influences – I mean not only the study, which involved all sorts of different academic disciplines; psychology, sociology and so forth which I hadn't met before, and there were student groups that met for Bible study and discussion so there was lots and lots of discussion and questioning. I remember reading books by Dr Leslie Weatherhead and by C S Lewis and so on and I think feeling probably more firm in my faith.

3 Joining Wesley Mem

I went along to Wesley Mem the first Sunday to an evening service. There was a junior minister, at that time there was a superintendent and a junior minister whose name was Rodney Cox and he said 'would you like to come along to a house group that we are just starting' which was meeting at the Manse which was then in Divinity Road. So I went along to this house group and started meeting people and really belonging to Wesley Mem has really been a major part of my life more or less ever since.

So if we take you back to 1966 or soon thereafter, were you also attending other church activities?

Oh well yes quite quickly. Of course the church was very much pews and pulpit and there was quite a large evening congregation as well as morning and also of course there was a very large student group. I became involved in various social activities like Church parties and things like that and then the minister asked me 'are you looking for a job?' I thought he meant helping with the catering at the party and he said no, would you like to be overseas secretary. So I was for quite a long while what we still then called 'overseas mission' involved in organising weeknight meeting and a Sunday speaker.