

A Day with USPG

The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG) has the distinction of being the only large Anglican missionary society that is not predominantly Evangelical in outlook. It was formed from a union last century between the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (which was moderately Tractarian) and the Universities Mission to Central Africa (which was firmly Anglo-Catholic). Eleanor's father had been a USPG missionary in India for many years, so when Bromley Parish Church was invited to participate in a USPG Day in Canterbury on a Saturday in October, we were interested to attend.

The event was entitled "Bridging the Gap". The thinking behind the title was that USPG feels it needs to explain itself and its work to the parishes which support it; thus the "gap" which needs bridging is between USPG on the one hand and the parishioner in the pew on the other. If anything that perception was confirmed by the fact that the event was very nearly cancelled the night before, owing to poor take-up. The hope had been that parishes from the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester with an interest in USPG should send representatives; in fact only eight people attended, including ourselves, representing just six parishes. We admired the two USPG representatives who ploughed on with the session in what must have seemed rather discouraging circumstances.

The most inspiring element of the day was a film about the work of USPG in setting up a housing cooperative for poor inhabitants of a mountainous region of Chile. This was all the more interesting because of the recent personal involvement of one of the USPG representatives present, a young graduate of St John's College, Durham called Alison. USPG was seen carrying out this vital task in close cooperation with the local community and in the teeth of obstruction from monopolistic construction firms and other powerful vested interests. It was also interesting to note that, despite its Tractarian and Anglo-Catholic heritage, USPG was clearly able to work in close partnership with the local parish that appeared to be towards the extreme Evangelical end of the spectrum. Alison confirmed that this was part of a trend to broaden USPG's theological base.

We were given a CD-ROM entitled Mission Explorer which (we believe) invites the user to make a virtual journey to various mission fields including Brazil, Chile – and even Britain and Ireland! We shall be giving this to the Vicar so that it can be made available to those who would like to view it.

There was no formal element to the day, in the sense of enlisting Parish Representatives or the like. The purpose of the occasion seemed to be simply to inform those present, and we have little doubt that there was a feeling of gratitude towards those parishes who sent delegates, few as we were. For our part, we were left in no doubt as to the commitment of USPG to its invaluable work of spreading the Good News in a multitude of often challenging ways.

Eleanor and Edward Perks