

LEADERSHIP and VISION

Reflections by Jimmy Hamilton-Brown, formerly Team Rector of Dorchester

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INTRODUCTION

If we take seriously what was said in “[A New Way of Working](#)”, produced for Parish & People in 2000, it means that the clergy will have to take a good hard look at the way they work.

It is now obvious, except in very exceptional circumstances, that the clergy can no longer be the do-it all yourself type of priest whereby he (and it was he until recently!) did everything in the church except teach in the Sunday School and arrange the flowers.

MODES of WORKING

Some work done by the Alban Institute in America suggests that clergy operate in different ways depending upon the size of the congregation they are dealing with. The situation there is of course different in that they have responsibility for a congregation whereas Church of England clergy are pastorally responsible for all who live within the parish boundaries – but the American perspective is illuminating:

SIZE OF CONGREGATION	ROLE OF INCUMBENT
Less than 50	“PAWN”
50 -150	PASTOR
150 -350	“MANAGER ”
More than 350	OVERSEER

50-150 Traditionally the Church of England parson has worked as a **pastor**. Most communities had their own vicar and it was possible, at least in rural areas, for the vicar to know his resident population well enough for him to act as the pastor (shepherd) to all.

150-350 The pastoral days are mostly gone, and clergy are faced with a congregation (or several congregations) totalling over 150, not taking total population into account. To operate this effectively clergy need to move into the “managerial” mode. All the indications are that clergy find this transition from being Pastor to Manager very hard. They are forced to think and operate in a completely new way.

Congregations over 350 demand another shift, perhaps by being divided into more manageable units with different congregations meeting in the same church building or perhaps initiating a church plant.

The joker in the pack is the priest who deals with a community of less than 50. I call him a “Pawn” because, far from *leading* a congregation, he is often at the beck and call of a few powerful lay people - perhaps the lord of the manor!

Most clergy have been trained (understandably) to work as pastors. We now have to change our task to being leaders of a team with laity as well as clergy working together.

CHANGE

This means that clergy and congregations have to face the fact of change. Change is never easy or popular. But given our present circumstances it is a fact that we are forced to face. Some say that change is risky. Of course it is! But we need to understand that trying to stay put, and papering over the cracks is just as risky if not more so.

If we do not face up to change now, we shall reach meltdown as we try to spread incumbents even more thinly over a larger area, whilst expecting the church to function in the same way as before.

The day of the Incumbent as Pastor of one small congregation has gone. Change is inevitable. Clergy therefore have to cope first with change in themselves and then learn how to enable change in their parishes.

David Wasdell, of the Urban Church Project, was helping clergy as far back as the 1970s to face up to change. This diagram shows the factors that facilitate change, versus the factors that hinder change.

CHANGE	
HINDRANCES	HELPS
Fear	Don't try too much at once!
Loyalty to the past	Avoid needless upsets
Lack of Trust	Grow mutual respect; Allow opposition
Bad selling	Do careful research
Lack of Vision	Encourage a long term view
Loss of position and influence	Show gentle enthusiasm

This diagram requires explanation!

HINDRANCES TO CHANGE

FEAR. Most people are afraid of change. Some express fear on behalf of others. Real change always has a risk in it. We will not get it all right first time.

LOYALTY TO THE PAST. The Church of England has a past, which cannot be ignored and does not go away. Tradition has great strengths, and we ignore at our peril the lessons from the past.

LACK OF TRUST. Trust is something that can only be earned. Newcomers (ordained or lay) cannot arrive in an existing community and expect people to

trust them without any past experience. Earning trust takes time, so do not rush into change.

LACK OF VISION. Churches today get a battering from the media and popular opinion. We appear to have our backs to the wall, and often feel very discouraged. Church people often need help to take the long term view, and to see the situation as if through God's eyes. Facing change is a spiritual challenge.

BAD SELLING. Those who propose change must do their homework properly and make a case for the changes that are needed. Make sure people clearly understand what is being proposed. Allow time for these ideas to sink in. To do this requires simplicity, consistency and repetition.

LOSS OF POSITION AND INFLUENCE. Some will object to change because they see that their own well established positions will be diminished or lost altogether. It is hard to "sack" people, but even in the church this is sometimes necessary. It is one of the challenges that all leaders face.

HELPS TO CHANGE

These apply to all who wish to bring about change in the life of a community – not just those believed to be (or who believe themselves to be) in positions of authority!

DON'T TRY TOO MUCH AT ONCE! There is a limit to the amount of change that is possible at any given time. If you try to do too much too soon it can actually hinder progress.

AVOID NEEDLESS UPSETS. There are some things that we might like to change that would cause unnecessary trouble. Be prepared to drop them or at least postpone them.

GROW MUTUAL RESPECT. It is inevitable that when change is suggested some people will object, feeling hurt and upset. We need to accept the fact that change always has this effect. Change is always painful.

ALLOW OPPOSITION. This is vital. It is worth remembering that democracy only works well when there is effective opposition. It is very important to listen carefully to those who disagree and allow them to have their say. In this way any change that does come about will be sharpened up and properly planned.

DO CAREFUL RESEARCH - before presenting your ideas for change. Think, plan and pray through the matter carefully. Consult those who have had to initiate similar change in other churches. There is no point in re-inventing the wheel. Learn from other people's mistakes.

GENTLE ENTHUSIASM is essential. If you are not enthusiastic about change yourself then people will soon catch on. Having said that, the enthusiast needs to hasten slowly and gently. We are dealing with people not theories and things.

As the diagram on page 3 suggests, these Helps and Hindrances are in tension, pulling in opposite directions. Change can only take place when the ties to hindrances are cut. Imagine the arrows are elastic bands, pulling on the central vertical bar. If we do not succeed in "cutting" the bands to the hindrances, the moment we stop "pulling" on the Helps to Change, the vertical bar will spring back to where it was! That seems to happen quite frequently when a new incumbent arrives!

LEADERSHIP

Most incumbents are now called to be the leader of a team, or to use a Biblical image, the head of a Body. The function of the church is carried out not by the priest alone but by the whole congregation, with every member having a part to play, not only in the church but also in the community.

The danger of much lay ministry as practised today is that it majors on church activity, with the result that Christians become withdrawn from the world.

This is in contrast with the way Jesus worked. God incarnate became involved in all human life.

But what does it mean to be the leader of a team? It is not something clergy normally learn at theological college!

If the church is to function as the Body of Christ, what is essential according to the New Testament is “episkope”. This word that is hard to translate; perhaps the nearest we can get to it is “oversight”.

The following statement emphasises the importance of leadership for the church, and this becomes even more crucial as we learn to work as the Body of Christ where everyone is involved in all kinds of Christian ministry.

So what do we mean the word “episkope”?

“Episkope”?

“The body of Christ needs oversight and leadership. The New Testament injunction is on the existence of ‘episkope’ – oversight.”

Ian Cundy • former Bishop of Peterborough

What “Episkope” is not

- It is NOT delegation - ministry already belongs to the whole Body of Christ.
- It is NOT merely management – the church is not a business but a community of love, a community of disciples.
- It is NOT just acting as a consultant - someone to be turned to when there is a problem.

Perhaps it would be helpful here to give an explanation about the three words we should not use .

DELEGATION is a word commonly used. The hard-pressed parish priest realises s/he cannot cope on his own, so s/he is forced to share some of his/her responsibility with lay folk. That sounds fine, until you realise that delegation implies that the task really belongs to the priest, and it is just being shared for pragmatic reasons. Because the priest cannot do all that is required, s/he delegates certain tasks to suitable lay people. Ministry is seen as still belonging to the priest.

If we take the New Testament seriously (and the Old as well) it is the whole church that has the vocation to ministry and priesthood, not just the ordained clergy. (See I Cor 12, I Peter 2, Exodus 19)

MANAGEMENT is now the “in word”. Although it is true that we can learn from management principles, the more I think about it the more I become convinced that it is a mistake for clergy to see themselves as managers. There are other reasons to which I will refer later, but the church is not a business; lay members need to be treated as **disciples** implying that we are all learning together, and at the same time responding to the call of Christ and the church.

One cannot treat disciples in the same way as paid employees. In the church some will be called to lead, but they cannot command!

CONSULTANT The clergy do have special expertise; that is why they went to college and why the stipendiary ones at any rate served a title. People will turn to clergy for guidance and help. But clergy do not just operate when they get called in a crisis.

Effective leaders have to be in constant living contact with people.

John Garnett, of the Industrial Society, once stated to a roomful of apprentices that a good leader must be constantly walking the shop floor. And he named Jesus as an example.

It is stating the obvious to say that the Christian minister must base ministry on the model of Jesus. If we want to know how to deal with people then

Jesus tells us, and more than that, he shows us in his dealings with the disciples and the crowds.

The Christian leader must never forget that first and foremost he is a pastor. Being out of touch with the people is courting disaster. The pastor always puts people before policies, and principles – even Biblical ones!

Jesus spent a large amount of time, particularly in the latter part of his ministry, dealing with the disciples. He spent time teaching them, encouraging them and sending them out on mission. They learned by doing and returned delighted, saying in effect “It works!” (See Luke 10)

Jesus did not try to avoid disagreement and controversy. Conflict is sometimes inevitable. Michael Harper in “Let my People Grow” pointed out that for a body to function properly there will be tensions in the some of the muscles. When the Body of Christ is working and growing there are bound to be problems and differences of opinion, indeed democracy only works well when there is an effective opposition. To find the right way forward requires adequate disagreement.

Jesus is our great high priest. It is true that the New Testament never uses the word priest in relation to anyone in a responsible position in the early Church - the words used are presbyter or episkopos - translated *elder* and/or *bishop*. Scholars say that these two titles were interchangeable. However the use of the word priest to describe the Christian minister is not entirely inappropriate. The job of the priest within a congregation is to cope with conflict, anger, sin and frustration. Occasionally priests will need to “absorb” such human behaviour into themselves without reacting or retaliating. Their ministry is to be a priestly ministry of reconciliation. (See II Cor 5)

Having said all this, leadership styles will inevitably be different. St. Paul was different from St. Peter, and both of them were very different to Jesus. At a local chapter meeting mention was made of Col. H Jones who lost his life in the Falklands War. Most of us think of him as a hero, but apparently some officers considered his leadership was reckless. “No good officer would allow

himself to get into such danger when the lives of so many men depended on his leadership.”

The Lord has made us all different and we are not called to copy others in the way they do things. We all have different gifts, personalities and abilities; so our style of leadership will reflect the way we have been made.

LESSONS FROM MANAGEMENT

Although I think it is a mistake to see ourselves mainly as managers, there are things that we can learn from management theory. Some of the theories below appear mutually contradictory. We need to apply those which suit us and our situation best.

Peter Drucker gives us a useful summary of what management is all about. (Quoted by Charles Handy in the “Handy Guide to the Gurus of Management” on BBC World Service)

Tasks of a Manager

(Peter Drucker)

- Sets objectives
- Organises
- Motivates and Communicates
- Measures Results
- Develops People (this also includes developing the manager!)

Another summary about the task of management is based on the “Ten Commandments” of Gary Hamel, also quoted by Charles Handy.

Some Commandments for Managers

(Gary Hamel)

- Be flexible
- Listen to others
- Be open to new ideas

- Look out for talent
- Encourage experimentation

A refreshingly different approach comes from Ricardo Semler, a Brazilian entrepreneur, who has revolutionised his company by altering all the rules. His emphasis is on people. It looks very much like the way Jesus did things!

Have faith in People

(Richard Semler)

- Trust people and they will do their best
- Don't be a nanny
- Let talent find its place
- Make decisions quickly and openly
- Don't be afraid to ask for help

Elizabeth Welch of the URC makes this comment in her chapter entitled "Who sees the Vision?" in "Leading, Managing, Ministering" published by Modem.

Management or Leadership?

(Elizabeth Welch)

- Management is to do with maintaining the status quo
- Leadership is to do with moving an organisation on

Diocesan bishops tend to fall into the trap of being managers because of the enormity of what is expected of them. They have to be concerned with keeping the show on the road, and do not have time to move the church on by giving visionary leadership. They need, as we all do, time to pray, think and plan. Nowadays much significant thinking and writing about mission and ministry is coming from suffragan bishops who are not so caught up in the ecclesiastical machinery

I discovered this useful summary of what is expected of an effective leader in an advert in the Daily Telegraph.

What makes a Good Leader?

(Paul Walker of SAGE)

- Know your people
- Develop your people - *Give responsibility with adequate support*
- Be Proactive - *Take initiative & remain visible*
- Be Inspiring - *Create vision*
- Challenge the Status Quo - *Question everything*
- Welcome Change - *Understand the big picture*

A large part of what priests are called to do is to inspire, and that implies **enthusiasm**. It has been said that no church is more enthusiastic than its leaders. Much enthusiasm is required to overcome the bad press and the gloomy statistics with which we are constantly being bombarded by the media.

This leads to another important point for leaders made by Elizabeth Welch. The effective leader has to take the people along with him. There is little point in having all the vision and enthusiasm in the world if you cannot take people with you. Even Jesus found this hard. He knew what his Father expected of him, but he had great difficulty communicating this to the disciples. He knew he had to face going to Jerusalem, but Peter (realising the implications) did his utmost to stop him. To **communicate vision** takes patience and time. In fact the disciples never really understood Jesus and his mission until the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit came upon them in a new way.

The task of leadership is closely connected with vision. Whereas management is concerned with keeping the show on the road, Leadership is concerned with mission, vitality and growth. The writer of Proverbs reminds us “Where there is no vision the people perish” (29, 18) Vision is something that comes from God and springs from prayer and worship. The prime responsibility of clergy is to be in touch with God and to be open to the leading of his Spirit.

This does not mean excluding the laity. John Adair makes it clear that the more we share our decision-making, the better.

People will feel involved and therefore be more committed when the way forward becomes clear. Having said that you cannot delegate leadership, or you cease to be leader.

John Adair goes on to make it clear that vision must be earthed in a task.

Vision

(John Adair)

- Vision without task is a dream
- Task without vision is a form of drudgery
- Vision without action is merely a dream
- Action without vision just passes the time
- Vision with action can change the world

Elizabeth Welch emphasises there are two aspects of vision. The first is *“Getting the message”* The second, but equally important, is *“Getting the message across.”*

The danger of much synodical church government is that it looks for a limp consensus – the ‘safe’ option to which few can object, with the result that vision and prophecy get stifled. I do not find the OT prophets looking for popular support before proclaiming the word of the Lord! The church today has accepted the importance of agreement, at the expense of prophecy.

THE TASK OF THE LOCAL CLERGY

The former Archbishop of York, David Hope, returned to parochial ministry. He believed that revival of faith is likely to start at the parish level. The future does not lie with the central structures but with the people in the parishes. If he was correct the local congregations have a vital part to play.

Bishop Anthony Russell, when he worked at the Arthur Rank Centre at Stoneleigh, wrote a book entitled "The Country Parish". In it he suggested new roles for the parish priest.

The Roles of the full time Priest

(Anthony Russell formerly Bishop of Ely)

- Call out a local ministry
- Define and set goals
- Provide insight & knowledge
- Take ultimate responsibility

Primarily the Incumbent is instituted to call out a **local** ministry. In these days of multi-parish benefices this is obviously essential. Each church needs a local pastor. It could, for instance, be an OLM or a Reader, working with churchwardens and Lay Pastoral Assistants. We must avoid at all costs an OLM or Reader being seen as the "do it all myself" vicar. The incumbent will need to know the people well so that he can act as a talent spotter.

It is significant that Jesus never asked for volunteers, he called people by name and said "Follow me".

We are still struggling to discover how the various forms of ministry fit into the picture. The fact that Locally Ordained Ministers, Lay Ministers and Pastoral Assistants are permanent, and remain in post when a new Incumbent arrives, and will probably still be around when he has gone, is something we are having to try to come to terms with.

The incumbent will not only know the people, he will also know the local situation so that he can help the local community define and set realistic goals. One of the significant differences between a manager and a leader is that the leader is always on the lookout for new ways and new approaches.

By experience and training the incumbent is in a position to offer insight and knowledge. The word priest means a bridge-builder. For a bridge to be effective it has to be grounded at **both** ends. We have to be grounded in God and grounded in the community.

However much ministry is now shared the incumbent is still ultimately responsible, primarily to God but also to the Bishop for what happens. I noticed when I was Rector of Dorchester that if things went well the church got the credit (quite right too!) but when things went badly I got the blame!

Bishop Ed Salmon formerly of South Carolina has written on the theme of “Ministerial Leadership” and draws attention to the new way clergy are now called to work.

We need to rethink leadership

(Bishop Ed Salmon of South Carolina)

- Proclaimers not housekeepers.
- Make disciples who can make disciples whose life is transformed and flows out into communities – carrying Christ to the community.

In South Carolina there is no shortage of clergy, and Episcopal congregations are bursting at the seams, but when I was there in the 1990s they seemed to have little idea of lay involvement in ministry. Hence his call for the need to rethink leadership.

New Christians are often the most effective in sharing their faith. They have an enthusiasm for the gospel which those of us who have been committed for years have tended to lose. They also have the added advantage that they still have contact with friends and family outside the influence of the church. Much of our church activity tends to remove people from contact with the world at large.

When this paper was discussed by our Chapter one incumbent reminded us that we were called to have an apostolic ministry, and that this includes being evangelists and prophets. All that is said about leadership must never be allowed to detract from this “basic” calling, to proclaim God’s word to those outside as well as inside our churches. This proclamation will often mean that we are at odds with the society and the world in which we live. Often as

Christians we are called to be “counter culture” in order to remain loyal to our Lord.

Perhaps the hardest task facing parish clergy is to have to face up to the expectations of Church people. They expect certain things of their clergy; and with this new way of working clergy will have to walk a fine line between on the one hand fulfilling expectations, and on the other enabling change and growth. Isolated and discouraged laity certainly need loving support. They are, after all, in the front line.

But if people are to grow, clergy do need to stand back and let disciples learn for themselves, make mistakes, and discover their own abilities.

If the clergy do too much we inhibit the laity in the work to which they are called. A further problem lies not only with the congregation but with the population who still expect the clergy to work in the old way. As one of my friends, Ron Wood, of St. Gargoyles, fame wrote, *“After all we’ve been saying about shared ministry, there are still people who think the Vicar ought to do it all.....When you go and visit your friends, you’re showing that you care about them, which is, whether you realise it or not, showing them that **God** cares about them....[As a priest] I don’t have to share my ministry with anyone. I just recognise that everyone has a ministry. I don’t delegate my work to anyone. It’s your work all along”*

THE FUTURE IS IN GOD’S HANDS

The present crisis facing the C of E presents us with great opportunities. The situation is far from hopeless if only we will listen to God, and be prepared to move on.

The church today badly needs prophets and visionaries, the kind of people who are uncomfortable to live with. We need another Francis or another Wesley to give us this nationally, but locally it is the task of the whole church to have time for vision, to listen to God, to understand the world, to see visions and to dream dreams. (Joel 2)

We only need to look at the persecuted church in the Sudan to realise that God is at work when humanly speaking the situation appears impossible.

A Comparison (2004)

The Diocese of Salisbury	Population 1.2m	468 licensed clergy
The Province of the Sudan	Population 34m	(70% Moslem 5% Christian)
2,000 clergy in 24 Dioceses	<i>And the church in the Sudan is growing!</i>	

The Church in the Sudan is growing fast in spite of the shortage of clergy, opposition, and persecution. In 2004 we were told the church in China has grown from 800,000 in the 1970s to over 80m. By the end of the 1960s all visible signs of Christianity had been eradicated. Mao destroyed the buildings and the Bibles, but he could not suppress the people of God.

If God is expecting the church in England to continue and indeed grow, then He must have a way forward for us. To sum up the importance of understanding this new role for the clergy and the laity I end with a quotation from Rowan Williams made at the time of his appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury.

Rowan Williams says

- *If you don't know what the clergy are for, you won't have real laity.*
- *There is no church without the clergy equipping and enabling, serving the laity, whose task it is to fulfil the mission of the church.*

Together with our congregations we need be looking to God for a new vision and to be asking the question "What is God saying to us today?" Our task is to discover it, so that Christ's Kingdom may be extended.