

Lay Discipleship and Leadership

A paper presented to a 'Leadership in Collaborative Ministry' Consultation 1999

Hilary Ineson identifies eight key issues that are still relevant today

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In this paper I want to focus on the gifts and needs of those lay people who do not have a formal role in the life of their local church - the people who sometimes describe themselves as 'only worshippers'. They are very much at the heart of some of the Church's thinking and theologising, but last in the line when it comes to developing practice or the investment of resources. We talk and write about the whole people of God, but there is very little evidence that our actions follow our thinking. This is especially true when questions about leadership are in focus.

*"At the heartis 'a vision of the Church as the **whole people of God** (my emphasis,) working together and sharing responsibility for the ministry and mission that God has entrusted to them.'* **1998 Report of the Edward King Institute.**

*" I was describing one of the most successful Local Ministry Teams in theDiocese where the clergy and members have a shared vision of mission, share in decision making and planning of ministry and support each other's pastoral work.....I was describing, as I would to a parish considering Local Ministry, the effect of a collaborative ministry team in broadening the involvement of the congregation in mission and ministry... I was interrupted in my flow by someone from New Zealand who said, 'That's Team Ministry, not Total Ministry. I was shocked. I became defensive..... (after reflection,) It enabled me to recognise that we are still thinking in terms of incremental change.....how we can move things round, to keep them going. We are not yet looking at Total Ministry.'" Quoted in **Ministry** as part of a report from an international conference on Local Collaborative Ministry.*

These examples illustrate the current differences between the *espoused theory* of the Church and its *theory in use*, in relation to lay discipleship in the world - Monday to Saturday Christian living.

In our espoused theory we are committed to thinking of ministry as the task of the whole people of God - the laos. Many Diocesan strategy documents begin with a statement about the importance of our baptismal calling:

"Ministry is derived from our baptism and discipleship and therefore involves the whole people of God. Most Christians who are not ordained to diaconate and priesthood exercise their ministry primarily in the secular world. Indeed it is there that the mission of the Church is seen at its sharpest and it is there that the holy and sanctifying nature of the Church infects the wider world." **Durham Diocese**

*"Ministry is the outward expression of our inner Christian faith and discipleship. **All faithful disciples have a ministry.....For most Christians, most of the time, their ministry is going to be exercised where they live and work, not in church,** (my emphasis).... One of the greatest gifts the laity has to offer is making connections between what goes on in church*

*and everyday life and work. The encouragement and releasing of this gift will transform the Church and our everyday ministry." **Derby Diocese.***

However, our theory in use [that which effects how we actually behave] is that the only way we can think about leadership, or act to develop it, is in terms of formal ministries, ministry teams or some other form of recognised service in and through the local church. Total ministry, which includes those lay people who work out their discipleship in their daily lives **as** the local church rather than 'on its behalf', is not very well understood or practised in the Church of England.

The recently published report "**Called to New Life - the World of Lay Discipleship**" GS Misc 546 begins with the experiences of six lay people from Peterborough Diocese. Peterborough is one of the few Dioceses that has a clear commitment to putting some of its resources into supporting lay discipleship in the world. Even so the laity quoted in the report found that they were undervalued by their local Church for what they do in their daily lives and that the Christian leadership they exercise at work or in the home is ignored. The Report includes a survey of diocesan work and that of other agencies that are concerned with the lives of lay people from Monday to Saturday. In the descriptions of the work currently being done the word 'leadership' rarely if ever appears. Those working in this area are concerned to enable people to think theologically, to be able to develop an appropriate spirituality and to discover how the local and diocesan structures can support such laity. There is little or no evidence to suggest that the Church might help them to consider their own leadership role in their secular lives, or how their secular experience might contribute to local or Diocesan Church life.

*"In a conversation with a congregation member, she apologised for not being a 'proper' Christian. When asked about what she meant, her response was - 'Well, I don't do anything in the local church. I don't really have time'. She was secretary to the local MP, ran Neighbourhood Watch for her immediate area, was a school governor, mother and wife - yet she felt that she was not serving God or the local church through any of these activities. The church at which she worshipped had somehow given her the message that she was not 'proper' because she did not have a role in the church." **Quote from Called to New Life.***

Eight Key Issues:

In thinking about questions of leadership in collaborative ministry and lay discipleship:

1. How can the majority of lay people who will never take up a formal role in the local church be recognised and valued? How can their leadership at work and in the community be valued? This valuing and recognition must include some reference to the leadership roles such people have in work and family settings and in voluntary service that is not connected to the church.
2. What part can they play in the development of the church's future in collaborative ministry? How can they play that part without becoming so involved in the 'ministry' and life of the local church that they do not have time to be involved with community activities and family life?

3. Leadership is currently being discussed as something exercised by the clergy alone or by a team that includes the clergy and recognised or specially chosen lay people. How can lay leadership in the secular world be valued?
4. What does it mean to offer leadership to lay people whose mission and ministry is firmly in the secular world?
5. What is the role of priests and lay leaders in relation to those living out their faith in their daily lives?
6. What does it mean to be a 'mature adult follower'? Leadership requires followership and there is little work on this issue at present. (Cliff Hayward from the Upside Down Trust is one of the few people working in this area.)
7. Could the institutional church survive if lay people chose to live out their faith in daily work and leisure rather than in taking up lay ministries in and through the local church?
8. How can we bring about change in our 'espoused theory'?

The institutional church's state of mind needs to be altered. Its understanding of who lay people are and how God calls them to discipleship in their daily lives needs to be brought into consciousness and to be expressed in action.

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