

## Can change be made to last?

In her booklet “Local Shared Ministry” (Parish and People 2009), Beren Hartless offers a vision of ministry that is fit for the 21st century. In it she speaks of the need for a culture shift.

A genuine culture shift is irreversible; it represents a clear 'moving on' from the past. Beren, in her paper, identifies several reasons why this will not be easy. People can too readily claim they support changes whilst actually working to preserve the status quo. 'Collaborative ministry' has been promoted for more than a generation; but it appears that the associated culture change has not yet happened:

**Bishops** still often hanker after having a Local Ordained Minister in every parish - implying that local laity are unable or unwilling to be the People of God in that place.

**Clergy**, feeling keenly their responsibility for the 'cure of souls', frequently drop subconsciously into a 19th century paternalism - effectively seeking to control a wilful and ill-informed laity to keep them on the straight and narrow.

**Busy lay people** frequently collude with this patronising attitude - because it's easier just to do what the Vicar tells them! Those who resist either leave the Church, or else they collude in a different way - by seeking ordination!

Good stories can be told where this debilitating culture of dependency has been broken. The irreversible shift, however, has not happened. If it is to happen now, three factors must be in place:

**1. Dioceses must remain committed over several decades to the disciplines and structures that support Local Shared Ministry.** Only this will ensure that Local Ministry Teams are renewed and that sharing ministry becomes the habitual lifestyle for both laity and clergy. This long term commitment is undermined when dioceses attempt to manage God's mission through successive high profile initiatives – including currently 'Pioneer Ministry', which can easily be anything but collaborative.

**2. A new conversation is needed between bishops, clergy and laity about 'the cure of souls.'**

A genuinely priestly ministry is about fostering people's spiritual well-being and enabling people, through their relationships and at their own pace, to find and grow their new life in Christ. In the past this was done by the parson in a settled village community. Today, most clergy are expected to do it while leading/managing a missionary congregation - where the laity 'collaborates' only by supporting the Vicar's or the diocesan strategy. Local Shared Ministry suggests a third way, provided clergy can face the implications.

**3. Lay people** who have enjoyed the challenges and fulfilment of shared ministry must not let it wither away - whether through neglect or by other priorities imposed from elsewhere. If this vital and renewing culture shift is to happen, lay people must set the pace.

Hot Topics are written to provoke discussion.

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