

parish and people

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WORKING TOGETHER IN TEAMS & GROUPS

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A Working Party was set up by the General Synod Ministry Co-ordinating Group in 1985 to look at the whole subject of Team and Group Ministries, now becoming so much an accepted part of the organisation of the Church of England. It was felt that a popular general guide to the whole subject was needed, which John Hammersley, a member of the Working Party, wrote. Parish and People is pleased to be able to publish this with permission of the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England.

John Hammersley has worked in some kind of informal or formal team or group ministry since he was ordained in 1960, and is now a member of the Northumbrian Industrial Mission's team of chaplains at the Metro Centre in Gateshead.

He died in 2004

FOREWORD

It's not surprising that deaneries should be interested in collaborative ministry — for basically collaborative ministry is concerned about working *with* people rather than *for* them. It's about clergy and laity taking one another seriously, working together, talking together, planning together, making decisions together — and every bit of that lies behind the word “synodical” which is about people walking together along the same road. An uncollaborative synod makes as little sense as a sexless marriage.

A deanery is a place where clergy should be working together. Several deaneries I know of are trying to work as teams with clergy specialising in certain areas that they're good in and then sharing their expertise — helping other parishes in the deanery to produce good parish magazines, or train Sunday School teachers, or liaise with state welfare services or what have you. And they might even get round to sharing out the Rural Dean's work — after all there's no earthly reason why one person should be good at all the things a Rural Dean finds on his plate. It'd be far better to get other members of Chapter to each take on one of his roles — counsellor, chairman of Synod, Sequestrator and so on.

A deanery is a place where lay people can make their skills available across the deanery. A “Who's who” listing all synod members, their occupations, hobbies and interests provides an invaluable resource for a deanery that really means business about shared ministry. Very few deaneries are sociologically monolithic. It makes sense for the ones with a surfeit of solicitors to share them around.

The deanery is a place where the strong parish can work alongside the not so strong. A new estate goes up in an understaffed area. One week of concerted visiting by a deanery team can give a new lease of life to the hard pressed parish. A knock in times saves nine.

A deanery is a place where the Church is exploring ways of working *with* the community on issues of mutual concern. If care of the underprivileged, or of drug addicts or the state of British farming or ecology are matters that both Church and local Community are involved in — get together. Don't go it alone.

The deanery is *the* place where synodical government has got to work — where lay chairman and Rural Dean, Clergy and laity have got to listen to one another, but in the end take concerted action. Once they do start working together the outlook abruptly changes. The Church finds itself no longer concerned with the largely artificial areas mapped out by its parish boundaries, but with the real community in which it is placed.

Those boundaries are being crossed umpteen times a day by umpteen people commuting to work, shopping, playing squash, going to school, having their appendix out. Because of that, church activities, church work and church strategy must be based regionally, geared to a larger area than the parish. Parish must cooperate with parish. Policy be worked out with neighbouring parishes. The deanery makes a good working unit; the ideal one to make the best use of shared resources, to make sense of training schemes, to liaise with caring agencies, to put the kibosh on narrow parochialism.

This article by John Hammersley is not about deaneries, but the collaborative style is one that clergy and laity in deaneries need to develop. It's interesting to substitute the word “deanery” every time you come across the word “team” or “group”. It doesn't always work but usually it makes you sit up, often makes you think, and sometimes makes you say “Wow”.

If we're going to have good deaneries we've got to be prepared to change. And good reading can change us for the better.

Peter Croft

WORKING TOGETHER IN TEAMS AND GROUPS

1. Background

Collaborative Ministry is part of a far wider concept. Solidarity is the word we use today: solidarity with other human beings, with the world of nature and with God. It is reflected in the style of many secular institutions – management teams or worker co-operatives. Hierarchies and authoritarian leadership are less acceptable than they once were. Yet at the same time we all feel uneasy with the way the world is changing so rapidly.

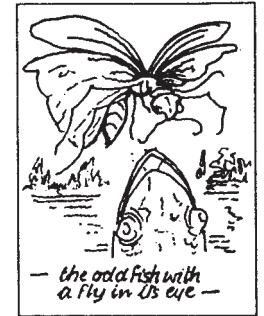
Twenty years ago, many Christians were excited by 'new forms of ministry'. In response to the Notting Hill riots of 1958, a challenge was thrown down by Lord Soper to find new forms for the Church, and an ecumenical Group Ministry formed. The Anglican South Ormsby Group in rural Lincolnshire had already been set up for nearly ten years. It was felt that the parochial system was already breaking down. The Pastoral Measure was the first attempt to put collaborative ministry into a legal framework in 1968. Since then, the world has changed even more. Collaborative Ministry is now a still wider vision.

Nevertheless, some parishes will be asked to consider changes because of the need for 'pastoral reorganisation'. Perhaps because there aren't enough clergy, the population has shifted over the years, or the present parish boundaries no longer represent any real community. In other places, the Gospel may be forcing people out of their narrower vision to see wider opportunities for God's people. Perhaps there is a need to create new congregations, to work with neighbours, to find patterns of local ministry, to enable ordained or lay workers to share the ministry with their people. At times, the pressure for change may be great and you may be asked to take quick decisions. You don't always have to be over-hasty, though!

2. Collaborative Ministry

Parishes are different. Even the same parish can have different needs today from those of 20 years ago. 'Collaborative styles of ministry' covers a wide variety. In parishes, just as in industrial or university chaplaincies, there has grown up the concept of ministry being shared among a team or group of clergy, some of whom may not be Anglicans. With both rural and urban deaneries, parishes seek to find ways of working together. In some dioceses there is talk of having a team of bishops. And some cathedrals speak of teams leading their worship and life.

For many others, 'collaboration' does not mean merely the clergy working together. It means the clergy and laity working together in the whole mission of the Church. There is collaboration between clergy and lay workers, both of whom are 'professionals'; collaboration between full-time and part-time workers; and between those primarily engaged in the secular sphere and those working primarily for the Church. With declining numbers of clergy, some regard this as not only a theological priority but also vital for the very existence of the Church into the future. They might say collaborative ministry is THE style of church ministry for the 1990s, and no longer just for the odd fish with a fly in its eye.



It includes formal and informal Team Ministries, formal and informal Group Ministries, single parishes working out a scheme for lay elders, Local Ordained Ministries, Reader and Lay Ministries, committees, specialist ministries, and many others. Collaborative Ministry covers a wide spectrum. From the tightly organised team ministry to a few people beginning to work out what it means to be Christians together . . . 'Collaborative Ministry is a dynamic thing. You can find it in places where there's no clergyman, as well as in places where there are ten. You can find it anywhere where Christians are working together in real openness, really sharing their own lives, real partners in mission. You can find it in a diocesan staff, an industrial team, a congregation. You can find it anywhere where Christians are willing to enter into real dialogue with the Church and the world around them and allow initiatives to pass out of their hands. Collaborative ministry is an agent of change . . .' (Peter Croft: *A Primer for Teams*: 1979 p. 9)

3. The Collaborative Style

The potential strength of collaboration has not yet been fully exploited. There is, again, a spectrum of styles. At one end is the style that many teams have adopted, working as a partnership in a new kind of ministry. Clergy are a 'peer group' of colleagues who share their work openly (not at all like vicar-and-curates). The Rector isn't the boss. Clergy and laity are equal partners too, in policy making and the government of the church. Ecumenical co-operation is the norm. Difficulties can occur when, for instance, there's a hangover of traditional expectations, when the Rector treats Team Vicars as curates. Even the legal framework provides 'the sharing of the cure of souls by an incumbent and one or more other ministers who shall have the status of incumbent' – they're supposed to be equal!

But any new style means new boundaries. Collaborative ministry demands extra clarity in the differing roles team members have. If parishes are to co-operate it's important not to fudge whose responsibility a particular job is. Local people need to know which vicar is responsible for them. Sometimes clergy feel that to become a Team Vicar (with 'freehold' limited to a number of years) is to lose job security. They need to know what happens to them later on, and who decides. Some specialist teams work with a high degree of expertise where the less experienced cannot be allowed to make the wrong decision.

So what about the attitudes that further collaborative ministry? Here is a list of some of them:

To be able to recognise the qualities of each individual member; it will be assumed you will discuss your work with the others, expecting to use the special skills of others and to share your own.

To be able to work with colleagues, not necessarily agreeing with them; some teams work from a consensus in which every member agrees, others go ahead with work when some members are not committed but when an agreement to differ is still regarded as agreement; there are times when lay people need encouragement openly to disagree with the vicar!

To be able to expose your own work to the scrutiny of others; it doesn't always come easy, especially to professional people.

To be able to be flexible; there is usually more than one good way to get a job done.

And to be able to be wrong.

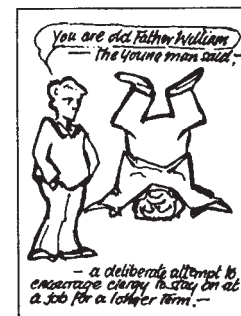
As well as working relationships, there are also emotional relationships. Some teams are positively marvellous, but YOU will never fit. The Archangel Gabriel wouldn't fit too well into some teams. But people are often conscious of the sense of joy in collaboration, and how it prevents you from being quite so miserable. 'We should help to give one another the confidence to make one more experiment than we dare.' (*The Collaborative Church* 1979 p. 148).



Collaborative ministry means working WITH people, not just FOR them. The style implies people are sharing their lives – not necessarily for ever (it isn't always like marriage) – and are teaching and learning, in an atmosphere of loyalty and enjoyment. Discipline is needed, certainly, preferably a welcome discipline in which worship and prayer are central. The aim? A new corporate identity in trust, which is more than just the sum of the individual parts.

4. Advantages and Disadvantages

For one writer, the advantages are 'the equality of leadership, genuine sharing of power, recognising creative tension, discerning and using different gifts, and the attempt to be a microcosm of the evangelical life'. Some positive gains have been a deep personal enrichment and growth. Many have found a wider and more committed ministry, and for some clergy there has been the experience of participation with women, including their own wives!



Collaborative ministry is one example of community living. It tries to restrain mere authoritarianism, and help people be more 'outward looking' (missionary work has often been most effective when done by a team). You don't have to be extrovert, but it can help! There has been a deliberate attempt to encourage clergy to stay on at a job for a longer term, and provide continuity. There has been specific training in management skills. Flexibility is important, but

so is order. That has brought analysis and reflection on the work in hand.

Disadvantages have been that progress sometimes appears to be slow: jobs that should have been done quickly have been waiting for common agreement too long. The trick is to be able to differentiate between matters that need immediate decision, and those that require wider consultation. Clergy have sometimes hankered after having their 'own' job, or being their own boss (it doesn't say much for the way they may approach lay people!). And, of course, some people are not capable of the maturity required. Group pressure can be strong, sometimes oppressive.

5. Evaluation

One important lesson being learned is the value of assessment both of the individual's work and that of the group. But evaluation goes against the grain for clergy, and many lay people are shocked at the thought of having their personal faith checked! Inevitably it's difficult to find agreement on standards and aims, and it might be impossible to find common criteria on which to assess the work of praying. But the main purpose of evaluation is not to criticise work being done but to encourage the individual in what he is attempting. Not so much 'I shouldn't do that if I were you', but more 'Why don't you try it once more?'.

Some teams have an officially appointed consultant, outside the group, who acts as friend and adviser. Ecumenical teams are specially encouraged to have consultants. Some teams find a similar group or team with which they can be 'twinned', to learn from each other. In some dioceses, there are specialist consultants, officers, or 'liaison teams' who can be called in to help. Most dioceses have a bishop or an archdeacon who might understand!



When the time comes for renewal of a licence, an assessment is certainly needed. Too many Team Vicars, for instance, feel that when their five year licence runs out they are compelled to look for a new job. Nonsense! They are, however, encouraged to spend time evaluating their ministry. The appointing body, or the bishop should help them. And, when a licence is renewed, it might be an opportunity for a corporate act of commitment, like an institution.

6. Informal Groups

It is now becoming accepted that many, if not most, of the examples of collaborative ministry are best described as 'informal groups'. And there is nothing wrong with that! In fact, you should consider seriously whether an informal scheme of your own making is what you would really want – and, if you decide you want to aim for a legal scheme, well you have to begin informally anyway. An informal group might be specially helpful in the country.



A great deal is to be learned about the dynamics of a group of people meeting together, especially when they disagree. Loyalty to collective responsibility (as in the Cabinet) can hide very deep differences. The same seems to have been true of the 12 disciples – a wide divergence of view within the team. There will always be problems with those who refuse to co-operate, but in any case, people need time.

One important job is to understand your geographical and sociological area, or what specific group of people you are working with. Doing your homework is vital. Perhaps by a survey, or by learning what people expect. And clarify the task of your church, and your team. That may sound simpler than it often is – evaluation isn't straightforward. It's important to write down agreements as you make them, and a brief statement of 'where we've got to' can be invaluable later on (especially if you ever have to draft legal documents).

But informal collaboration can be quite as effective as any legal scheme. Better be concerned about the spirit than the structures, though some framework can help. It will be easier in an 'expanding' situation (e.g. upgrading daughter churches) than in a 'contracting' one (e.g. where churches are due for closure).

What size should your group be? A large group (more than about eight) requires some kind of hierarchy, and it's easy to leave an 'odd man out'; when you have five, six or seven people, status is less important and the 'junior' inexperienced members can be particularly helped, decisions can be largely by consensus, and you can know one another well; if the group is smaller than that, the individual becomes very important (and a team of two is probably not a team). This thinking has sometimes been applied to deaneries. A Grubb Institute

paper in 1974 suggested that forms of team ministry are appropriate for a deanery more than a parish, and that there should be experiments in sharing the functions and work of a rural dean. A matter of good informed practice is consultation with other members of the group or team about appointments. Bishops, patrons and clergy are not always sensitive (like the bishop who wrote a letter to clergy 'I propose to make Mr Smith Rural Dean, have you any other suggestion?'). Members of a team must discuss changes in membership; priests-in-charge, curates and lay workers should be treated as full members of a team. Some places have evolved elaborate ways of making appointments, involving candidates spending 24 hours with the team even before being shortlisted. It says something about how seriously the team takes the new person, and about their commitment to one another.

7. Clergy and Laity

If it's true that collaborative ministry can be found in places where there is only one clergyman or none at all, obviously the sharing of ministry among lay people (as well as professional church workers) is important. It's surprising to discover what lay people are allowed to do, even in the Church of England! Perhaps churchwardens and standing committees expect to share ministry in a parish, and administration and pastoral work is obvious enough, but many positions of leadership are often regarded as exclusive to clergy. Like baptism and marriage preparation and visiting the bereaved. Or conducting worship in church (to a greater extent than many places try), and helping distribute the sacrament both in church and outside it. There is training available (see Parish and People pamphlet 20 *Who does what?*). Power sharing can be tricky. Clergy often need to hold back, and lay people need encouragement to 'come forward'.



The last ten years has seen an explosion of collaboration between clergy and lay people – because there are more fully trained lay workers (some better equipped for church work than many clergy!), because there is more work in synodical government for lay people and clergy together, and because the feeling of the time has moved in the direction of partnership, anyway. Of course, older people still resist change. Just as they might resist the purchase of a motor

mower for the churchyard because Joe Soap has always done it. But they will not necessarily veto change, when they see that improvement is possible. Collaboration means persuasion and argument, too. House-group training, and small group work, popularised in the past, is still available. Many places are experimenting with lay elders or ministers, sharing more of the church's regular care and worship. Can you ever have any really collaborative styles unless there are women as well as men in a team?

There are special occasions when new things can happen: when the benefice is 'vacant' (no clergyman available), in preparation for confirmation, at a retreat or conference, as part of a Parish Life conference, at ecumenical gatherings for worship, and so on.

8. Groups

A group doesn't have a centralised structure. It's usually a number of equal incumbents, say, who can elect a leader. (Sounds like any good deanery!) They work together. The Group gives encouragement to the parishes and congregations. A loose federation. But it can also be very powerful in its support. In a new area, perhaps, or an ecumenical missionary project in a town centre, or in rural parishes.

Setting up a formal Group Ministry will involve the Committee Stage (a lengthy procedure of consultation with Pastoral Committees, Bishops, Patrons, Incumbents, Archdeacon, Rural Dean, Planning Authority and local PCCs to draw up a scheme that is acceptable). Then comes the Westminster Stage (when the Bishop sends proposals to the Church Commissioners and they continue with the legal machinery to set up the Group). But an agreement to remain an informal Group shouldn't be seen as a failure. Much ecumenical co-operation has been of this kind, and is likely to become more important. The vital thing to remember is: you decide what you want to do, and if it cannot be established legally, carry on informally.

A Group Council may be a new experience! It can be a decision-making body where lay people find they are able to influence the church. A useful lesson. In almost any kind of missionary venture, some Council of reference is going to be necessary, to represent the different interests involved. A Group Council should also be initiating work, checking that it has been done, encouraging smaller units within the whole and widening the experience of leadership.

Meeting together is crucial. Perhaps there cannot BE a Group if distance or transport is such an effort that people rarely meet, even on the telephone. Country parishes have sometimes clubbed together to run minibuses or coaches, to make sure Group services are well attended. One of the disadvantages may be that there are too many meetings! You may already have commitments in the parish, the deanery and the diocese. To set up a Group Ministry may be adding a fourth tier, and ecumenical co-operation will mean still more meetings. Remember it's more important to work collaboratively in a small group than to set up unnecessary extra structures.



9. Teams

A Team Ministry is officially a single benefice with a Team Rector appointed as leader of a team with Team Vicars. Overtones of central policy making, with constituent parts subservient. Are District Church Councils a lesser form of life than the central PCC? It can look like the old 'St Mary Portsea' type of parish with a vicar and a large staff of curates. But a closely organised team of church workers at the centre can also turn out to be a power house of excitement and new ideas. It can spill over to the congregations that something new is happening. Others can be fired with the enthusiasm. It can seem much more vital than any single one of the units on its own.

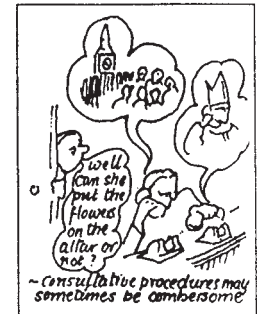
There may be a number of reasons for wanting a formal Team Ministry, set up through the Committee Stage and Westminster Stage and given the authority of the Queen in Council. If you want to encourage clergy to work in the north, where it may appear unattractive, and decent standard housing is required for them; if you have jobs for experienced people or specialists whom the parish cannot afford; if the old 'mother church' wants daughter churches to grow up but they can't be separate parishes; if there are new developments in housing or special work opening up for the churches; and so on. But remember the establishment of a Team Ministry is not the end of your task, just the beginning. An inaugural service is recommended, and should be an ecumenical and community occasion.



It's not necessarily the best thing to search for 'a good man' to be the Team Rector (as though you were looking for a budding bishop). Nor are you inevitably going to enjoy having a whole team of 'first class men'. They tried that in Woolwich in 1960 and it turned out to be a 'failure'. Someone of more use may be a man who's had some experience of working as a member of a team before. The mix of personalities is quite important, too.

10. Leadership

Those who are leaders in collaborative ministries need to be flexible. Sometimes urgent and decisive action is required immediately (and it would be stupid to wait for an agreed policy to be worked out; the leader has to take responsibility for unilateral action – that's his job). Frequently, the need is rather for patient consultation in arranging the next step (and it would be silly to act on his own). The trust needed between all participants in Christian ministry has to sustain leaders in exercising a variety of styles of leadership, whatever their own style may be. Consultative procedures may sometimes be cumbersome; they are sometimes perceived as an unreasonable check on a leader. But where consultation is ignored, the way lies open for manipulation. However benevolent the autocracy, the effect is to stifle initiative and vitality in others.



In some groups, leadership can become almost interchangeable. Like having a 'rotating chairman', some close knit teams can operate in such a way that any one member can, at a moment's notice, take over a colleague's work (and nobody notice the difference!). In others, the tasks are clearly assigned, so that every person has a job to perform and none of the others knows everything about it – the leader, in such a team, is likely to retain his leadership (more like a surgical team than a relay team).

One of the functions of leadership is pastoral. It is, of course, easier to deal with those difficult relationships on a one-to-one basis (we'll have

a word about it afterwards'). But if you're prepared to have a go, it can be more constructive to get the team to work them through. Dealing with anger creatively isn't easy in church, where it's assumed we have to be nice to one another. But then politeness is no way to run a railroad!

11. Further Reading

Groups and Teams in the Countryside – Anthony Russell SPCK
1975

A Primer for Teams – Peter Croft BCC 1985

Handbook for Teams and Groups – John Hammersley, BCC 1981

Parish and People occasional pamphlets –

Starter Pack for Teams, BCC

Teams and Collaborative Ministry – leaflets from BCC

Workbook for Deaneries – Partners,

Making the Deanery Work – Peter Croft, Parish and People

Deanery Maxi-Packs – Parish and People

