

# church leadership for the 21st century

The first church leaders I ever knew, back in the early 1950s, were Mr Pope, the leading layman in my Methodist church, and Mr Bishop, the minister. I have been confused ever since.

**A**nglicans did sort of know what a church leader was – he (always a ‘he’) was the vicar. He was the shepherd, the rest were the flock. Ministry was pastoral. The clergy cared for a Christian nation and gave it moral leadership.

But then exit the vicar in every village, cycling to evensong, Sunday as a day of rest, the authority of the dog collar, moral and ethical consensus, social stability, and all other sepia-printed images of our imagined past. And enter teenagers, rock music, Sunday television, Sunday sport, Sunday trading, secularism, post-modernity, moral relativism, living with partners, multiculturalism, hedonism, global warming, and a whole new millennium to get through.

Somewhere along the line, we deserted our old ‘pastor and flock’ model of church either because there were too few clergy left to sustain it or because we looked at our Bibles with new

eyes. Instead, we realised that we are a kingdom of priests, a gathering where all are ministers and a body in which everyone has a role to play.

And we have realised we are no longer a pastoral Church to a Christian nation; our nation no longer seems so Christian and mostly it does not want us pasturing it. So our self-understanding is changing – we must become a missionary Church to a post-Christian culture. If we don’t the next generations will know nothing about Jesus and the Church will die.

In this context church leadership has already changed radically in my lifetime and will need to change radically again. Already we have lost many of the male clergy, but they have been replaced by female clergy, unpaid clergy, retired clergy, Readers, youth ministers, children’s ministers, families’ workers, administrators, personal assistants, worship leaders, elders, ministry teams, leadership groups, standing committees and synods of every conceivable size. It’s



not quite ‘every member ministry’ but it’s certainly ‘many member ministry’ as we pour untold energy into servicing the many-headed organisational monster we have created.

Sadly, this recovery of the ‘body of Christ’ understanding of Church has turned the idea of church leadership internally onto the existing community. Leadership in the 21st century missionary Church must become focused outwards to the world not inwards to the Church. Internal church structures will need to be slimmed down so that our best people are not all tied up in them. Churches should be communities more than organisations. The role of the vicar will be to lead and enable the whole missionary community to infect the world with its faith.

As Archbishop William Temple put it about the time I was being born: 'The evangelisation of England is a work that cannot be done by the clergy alone; it can only be done to a very small extent by the clergy at all. There can be no widespread evangelisation of England unless the work is undertaken by the lay people of the Church. The main duty of the clergy must be to train the lay members of their congregations in their work of witness.'

So clergy leadership becomes more strategic. To pastor an existing faithful flock is comparatively easy, but to create, energise and deploy a whole missionary community needs new and rarer gifts.

We need to seek out and recruit new types of people for ordination, some of whom the selection process used to deliberately screen out. Active recruitment of the best people (strategists, pioneers and entrepreneurs dissatisfied with the status quo) is something that has not yet been tried – it is time it was. Another

challenge is to train and equip clergy for the leadership role we need – this too would be a novelty for the many clergy who feel they received an interesting education at college but were never actually trained then or later for the job they are expected to do today.

Leadership in the 21st century missionary Church of England is looking pretty challenging but also fascinating and exciting. Let's inspire new generations of leaders to rise to the challenge!

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