

April 2013

job seeking and moving on

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes is often overlooked. Its down-to-earth realism and logical view of life is often underrated in an age of instant communication and immediacy of results. Quite often Ecclesiastes is telling us to step back, observe creation and learn from the rhythms of life, time and seasons. It is arguing for wise and humble choices in life. When it comes to the modern appointment process this is good advice for leaders.

One of the most difficult decisions any leader faces is knowing when the autumn days in a post are arriving. That is, knowing when our useful time in a post is drawing to an end. For nature it is clear – the leaves start falling and creation buckles down for winter. For a leader it is harder to judge. Will the autumn season pass to a bright new spring in the same post, or has a point been reached where God might be saying it is time to move on? What principles can help us discern the call? In my many discussions with ministers there can be few other areas which cause so much personal anxiety and perplexity than vocation guidance. It also doesn't get any easier as we age, since factors like dependents and other considerations limit options! Making wise decisions is really important.

Knowing when to move

There can be different reasons to move. The main distinction is between voluntary and involuntary reasons. The latter – like death (!), the end of a contract (curates), retirement, or some other change in circumstances – enforce

change. In these cases the choice is made for us and we just have to get on with discovering our next role. It is helpful not to look back wistfully, but to look forward as creatively as we can, given the circumstances, and seek supportive advice throughout if necessary.

When moving is our choice it is much more subtle and the onus is on us to judge the correct course of action. There are certain pointers that can indicate whether or not autumn has arrived and we need to consider moving on!

Dis-ease

This is when we feel the Spirit saying it is time to move. We may not be able to put our finger on it exactly, but often in the process of applying for other posts (even if we are unsuccessful) future direction becomes clearer. I have known some people say that in applying elsewhere they realised they had in fact not finished the task they were called to do, and so they stayed put! For me a good rule of thumb in the past has been; if I am in a liminal place of unease at work, I plan to stay, but apply to leave (but only for posts that genuinely interest me). In this way I am open to the future, but also engaged in the present. It is important to keep this energy going, because applying for other posts is emotionally draining, time consuming and can be dispiriting. Keeping engaged with the present and all you can accomplish for Christ means you remain positive. If a sense of dis-ease is present it is important to hear it, take serious advice and pray.



Denouement

'I have given all I can' or 'I feel I have completed my job' are things often said to me by leaders. There is a sense of a natural break in the post. Perhaps a building project is completed, or a new leadership structure established. Whatever the reason, a sense of completeness can lead to a natural break for both the leader and the community they serve. It is simply time to go.

Difference

Sometimes different skill sets are needed at different times. We have to be honest as leaders about whether our particular gifts now match what a post requires. If a pioneer, risk-taking leader is in post for a while it is likely many changes and projects will have been made. After a while consolidation of all that has been achieved might be required and this is a different skill set. Being honest and appraising where we and where the church is at may help identify whether it is the right time to move on. I always respect leaders who understand what they are good at and avoid posts where they realistically will not do well. So, know yourself well and play to your strengths as far as you possibly can. If our match of person to post is poor our happiness and performance will suffer, or we begin to look for meaning in other areas, which may be worse. Similarly if we stay put, but the post actually needs a different skill, we might stifle the community we serve.

Dissatisfaction

Bluntly put we need to move because we are fed up! It is important to listen to such feelings. Understanding the underlying causes of dissatisfaction can help us discern future direction. I have always found senior colleagues quite helpful in talking things through with me. If they are too close for comfort, an independent and safe perspective will help us analyse. Will moving post help us develop, use our skills better, or help us become happier in our work? Moving for the wrong reasons will never help us,

but staying put if the role is wrong is likely to breed cynicism and disillusion. It will damage our soul.

Knowing how to look for new opportunities

There is lots of help for clergy considering their future ministry service. The [Patronage section](#) of the CPAS website has lots of advice. The Church of England Clergy Appointments Adviser, The Rev John Lee, is a great source of wisdom (his details are on the [Church of England](#) website). The church press, diocesan websites, the CPAS website, and other places all provide forums where posts are advertised. If you have not applied for a new job for a while it is worth booking yourself onto a day that explains the modern application process and gives you tips on completing forms and coping with interviews. (CPAS runs a day event called *Leading Edge – Moving On* for just this reason – see www.cpas.org.uk/leadingedge.) If you do apply for other posts it is important to feel you have given of your best in every respect and this may involve getting some outside help. For other leaders who are not clergy, the principles of using your networks to find support and get appropriate training still apply.

Conclusion

Moving posts is a natural part of our development as leaders. It can grow our capacity, help us learn new skills and lead to new pastures. It is good for God's church for leaders to move areas and share their gifts. Ecclesiastes suggests a modest approach to life. Such humility will serve us well as we judge discernment decisions. Involving others to advise and support us is important, but ultimately we have to listen to the Holy Spirit's lead and make prayer the centre of our vocation journey.

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Two exercises that might help you.

1. Get out the advert and person specification for your present post and prayerfully review it. How does it match to the post now? Identify what has changed and what might need changing. Write a new document for the post today and discuss your reflections with a trusted adviser. Is the post still the right one for you?
2. For clergy. Get out the Ordinal and read it again. Highlight what you do well and what you'd like to develop, or feel you would like to do more. Can anything be done to adapt your present post to help you develop these areas?

