

Rethinking the Church on Estates: the challenge of Total Ministry

by Alister Palmer

Soon after beginning work on this presentation I received an interesting paper from Joe Hasler who, in his usual quiet and thorough way, is exploring some of the key issues surrounding the diocesan strategy and the implications for ministry on estates. I commend his paper to you. My paper develops some of his ideas and I hope will be a positive contribution to the ongoing discussion.

Total Ministry defined

Total Ministry (otherwise known as mutual ministry, ministry of the baptised, ministering community) is part of a wider struggle in society to find a new paradigm of sustainability and of being human on this fragile finite planet Earth. It's about the creation of a community that reflects the Trinity. It's based on a belief that the future of Anglicanism lies in a diversification of ministry and recovery of the New Testament understanding of church as a ministering community that proclaims and shares the love of God in Christ; a community of ministers, interrelated and interdependent, empowered with the gifts which the Holy Spirit has given it. It is a way of being church in which every minister and ministry is valued equally and none is esteemed or ranked above the other (see 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13, 1 Peter 4: 10). It's about returning church to the people.

The word 'total' is used in two ways:

- (a) 'total' in the sense that it seeks to embrace all the baptised and to encourage full participation
- (b) 'total' in the sense that it embraces the whole of life (i.e. it embraces ministry in the life of the gathered church and ministry in the everyday lives of its members).

Total Ministry is a way of seeing ourselves and the church as Christ's agents in the world, as engaged in Christ's ministry, not our own. It is lived out differently in each community, taking into account the community's history, culture and gifts. There are principles but no set pattern or package, no program that fits all. If the church listens, the Spirit leads where it will, and we don't know where beforehand.

A story

I want to relate a story told by an African Caribbean woman and founding member of the Church of God of Prophecy that meets at Holy Cross, Inns Court. When she and her family arrived in Bristol from Jamaica in the 1950s she, as a communicant Anglican, naturally went to her local Parish church. After the service she was told in no uncertain terms that she was not welcome and that she should be looking for another church suited to her kind. This was deeply wounding and alienating and, sadly, it was an experience repeated in many of the cities across Britain that received the influx of new immigrants. It was not until the 1990s that a public apology was offered by the Bishop of Bristol.

What interests me is what happened afterwards. Like many Caribbean Christians, unwelcome in Anglican churches, she did not abandon her faith or regular church going. Rejection led her as it did many others to establish indigenous communities of faith of their own. Though most adopted a particular denominational allegiance, mainly Pentecostal, what they created were self-supporting

ministering communities in which the gifts of the Spirit and of leadership were called forth from their number and used in the life and mission of the church. Today, two generations on, the Church of God of Prophecy at Inns Court continues as a strong, autonomous and self-sustaining interdependent black-led church, healthier in many ways than many Anglican churches.

I recognise that one cannot readily transfer that experience to churches in predominantly white outer estates but it does highlight our dilemma and poses important questions.

Why is it that Anglican Church life and mission on estates continues to be dominated by a culture of paternalism, dependency and a chaplaincy mentality?

Why do we find it so hard to create churches of the people, owned and controlled by the people of the community? Why is it that on outer estates self-supporting, self-sustaining indigenous locally led ministering communities that are able to proclaim the gospel and strive for justice and peace in the midst of their own circumstances and communities are so few and far between?

What is also disturbing is that this problem of dependency is also evident in the well heeled better off leafy suburban Anglican congregations of our cities. The dilemma and debate is not peculiar to inner city, estate or rural contexts, which suggests that the source of our problem is likely to be both systemic and paradigmatic (viz. the way we see things).

Wes Frensdorff

One of the founders of the modern total ministry movement, Bishop Wesley Frensdorff of Nevada, analysed the prevailing Anglican way of being church and identified two systemic problems, one to do with the ministry delivery system and the other with the system of leadership and governance. These problems are interwoven and difficult to unravel.

Of the Anglican **ministry delivery system** Frensdorff says:¹

- ***it is essentially the English village model, but in overload***
- ***it is centred and heavily dependent on the 'cleric' – formerly the most educated person and main teacher in the village. Hence, church buildings are arranged as classrooms***
- ***it creates 'vicarious' religion, centred on the priest as the holy person, in whom is focused the religious power and knowledge***
- ***it tends to create dependence, rather than interdependence. If the priest is 'father', church members are children who never reach sufficient adulthood in Christ to exercise much of their ministries. If the priest is pastor, members are always sheep intended to follow, not lead***
- ***it is highly professionalised: centred on a professional with professional training***
- ***it is highly hierarchical***
- ***it is economically dependent in that it cannot function in its presently accepted traditional form without money***
- ***it therefore creates 'sacramental captivity'. Sacraments are available primarily where a professional priest is available. As a result there is a high degree of sacramental deprivation where the conditions of the model cannot be met.***

Of the **leadership and governance** system Frensdorff says:

- ***it has separated, or at least created a distance between the church's primary leadership and the community of faith.***
- ***the exercise of leadership takes second place to that of the imported leadership of the priest***
- ***it is largely clerically dominated because primary leadership is focused in the ordained offices. Mutuality is at the heart of Christian community and therefore mutuality in leadership is more authentic than is a hierarchical model.***

¹ See Josephine Borgeson and Lynne White (eds), 1990, *Reshaping Ministry*, Jethro Press, Colorado, pages 17 - 41

- ***the customary ministry delivery and leadership systems prevent our actualising the offering of gifts.*** Our members are largely convinced that they are giftless, especially for ministry
- ***the hybrid ecclesiastical democracy does not function with clarity.*** For example, a vote by orders is used as much to impede change as to develop consensus
- ***Our systems further either a high degree of dependence or a high degree of independence, but fall short in creating interdependence.***

Frensdorff says that to counter this we need to develop structures and practices that foster interdependence. We need to create "*ministering communities, rather than communities gathered around a minister.*"

This requires a paradigm shift, a quantum leap into a different way of thinking, being and doing. To achieve such a change we must be prepared to embark on a journey that is likely to be long, slow and difficult. It involves processes that move us beyond many of the inherited attitudes, behaviours and patterns of church life and mission that maintain dependence and a culture of ministerial and sacramental captivity.

Tom Ray

A former bishop of Northern Michigan, Tom Ray, says that the practice of the Anglican Church has been to collapse ministry down into the incumbent who is required to be the *liturgist, administrator, preacher, teacher, pastor, intervener, visitor, community leader, and bringer in of the youth.*

He says *this is seductive, destructive and dangerous. The larger you draw the circle the more destructive it becomes. It is a recipe for paralysis and impotence, for separation, for clericalism and anti-clericalism. For clergy it almost guarantees that they will be isolated, unsupported, and broken. And it guarantees for the laity that they will be under utilised, undervalued, have low self-esteem, and they will be disappointed in the clergy eventually.*²

For Ray, the answer to this dilemma is the recovery of the secret that *everything is shared with us in baptism. Priestly, diaconal and apostolic ministry don't belong to priests, deacons and bishops, they belong to the baptised.* Our task is to recover the total ministry of the baptised.

Roland Allen

Frensdorff, Ray and others drew on the work of Anglican missionary, Roland Allen, who in the early 20th century, challenged the way in which the Anglican Church was carrying out its ministry.

Reflecting on the Church's mission to China, Allen maintained that the pattern of church life, ministry and organisation adopted by Anglican mission agencies was unbiblical, foreign to the contexts and cultures in which they were seeking to serve and that it was producing a paralysing dependency and deprived the church of the very sacraments that are its life-blood.

Based on a careful study of St. Paul's missionary methods, Allen concluded that a truly indigenous church must be self-governing; it must own and control its life and ministry. Allen identified some basic principles based on his study:³

1. ***Every congregation, however small, has within its own membership sufficient gifts to carry out its mission in the world.*** (note that the word *sufficient* does not necessarily mean *all*)

² Thomas K Ray, 'The Small Church: Radical Reformation and Renewal of Ministry' in *Anglican Theological Review, Vol. 78, No 4, Fall 1986.*

³ See Roland Allen (1962, reprinted 1993) *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours?*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

2. ***Every Christian community should have handed over to it the Bible, the Creed, the Ministry and the Sacraments.***
3. ***The community is responsible for recognizing the spiritual gifts and the needs of its members, and for calling forth those ministries.***
4. ***The Christian community will share its message and its life with neighbouring communities not yet evangelised.***
5. ***The Holy Spirit, working on the human endowments of the community leaders, is sufficient for its life. Don't train them too much. Don't import them from outside.***
6. ***The Christian community should control and manage its own financial affairs independent of subsidy.***
7. ***The Bishop and his staff are crucial in this process.*** (e.g. Paul with Timothy, Titus, Sylvanus, Epaphros, etc).
8. ***Any Christian community that can't do these things is not a church; it's a 'mission'.***

If we measure the life of congregations on estates using Allen's criteria, which of them would be designated 'church'? Estate congregations might not and possibly should not aspire to be 'parish' in the traditional sense with all the trappings - PCC, churchwardens, AGMs etc. - but they should aspire to be 'church'.

Creating indigenous congregations: from dependence to interdependence⁴

To be indigenous, that is, to own and control, requires not only self-government but self-support. It involves autonomy, not in the sense of being isolated but of being responsible for our lives and response-able (i.e. able to choose a response rather than have a response chosen for us).

'Autonomy' is more than having the ability to be independent. Autonomy means having a strong sense of identity, purpose and ownership with the will and ability to act, and to do so interdependently.

A dependent congregation cannot be effectively interdependent just as a dependent person cannot be interdependent. Our model for autonomous congregational life has been the parish and most urban estate parishes rely on the redistribution of money from wealthier parishes and trust funds to support stipendiary clergy, any other paid staff they may happen to have and the upkeep of buildings. We depend on outside support and that support is increasingly under threat.

We may think that this dilemma will be resolved through the formation of partnerships: the clustering of estate parishes together with other parishes but this, in itself, will not liberate us from the jail of dependency.

There is very clear evidence that the net contributing parishes in many dioceses of the Church of England, particularly the larger ones, are beginning to move from a 'giving' to a 'paying' mentality (see Joe Hasler's recent paper). The longstanding practice of Jubilee in the form of redistribution of Diocesan resources from money-rich to money-poor is becoming increasingly tenuous. It is possible that sometime in the not too distant future, the support given to net recipient estate and inner-city churches will be either withdrawn or significantly reduced or be given subject to certain conditions and prescriptions from 'outside'. As it is, with the devolution of powers of deployment to deaneries we now have to 'fight our cause' in the deanery debating chamber. The prevailing 'bias to UPAs' principle adopted by Diocesan Synod seems inadvertently to have been unseated. But I must ask, does this matter?

It seems to me to makes little sense for net recipient estate parishes to continue to rest easy functioning in dependency in a system which tends to disempower and disable and in which continued financial support is in question. It may be that the threat of withdrawal or reduction in

⁴ One of the best outlines of the journey from dependence to interdependence is provided by Stephen Covey in his best seller ***The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People***, 1990, The Business Library, Information Australia. See page 49.

redistributed income will turn out in the end to be a godsend. At least, it is causing us to think more deeply and differently about the way we deliver ministry.

I am convinced that total ministry is our best chance of shifting estate churches from dependence to independence and on towards interdependence – I am convinced it is transferable to the urban estate setting. But the question remains, how do we move towards the realisation of the vision of total ministry in a situation in which not only the congregation but many individual church members are in a state of dependency in their personal lives? What time frame would we need to implement it and what resources will we require to achieve it?

Reflecting on my experiences both here and abroad, I have concluded that if the Church of England, Bishop and Diocese decide not to allow the room and flexibility needed for the successful development of total ministry; if the 'Powers that be' are unwilling to sit loose to or change the rules, regulations and requirements relating to the training and formation of authorised and ordained ministry then there is little chance we will get very far.

There's no halfway house, watered down versions of total ministry usually end up looking like the old paradigm dressed up in new clothes.

Mapping the journey into a Total Ministry paradigm

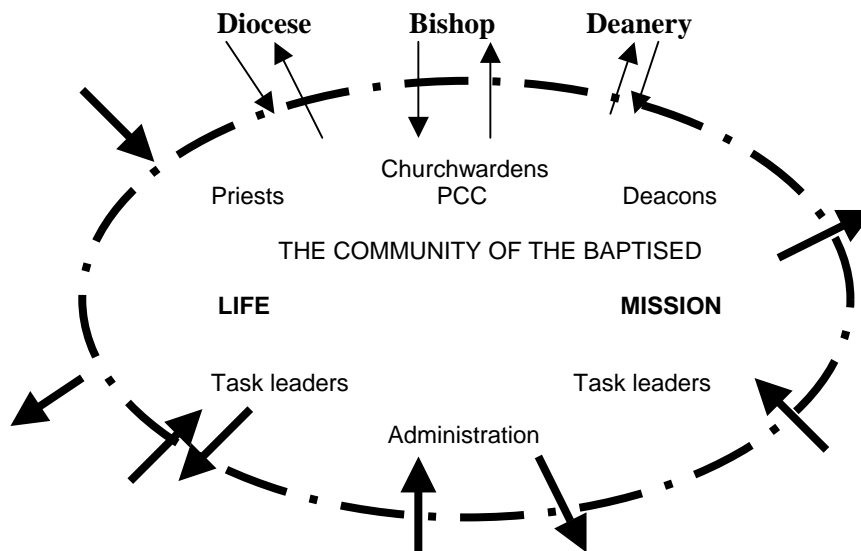
In describing the development of total ministry or the baptismal paradigm as it is sometimes called I am drawing on my experiences in Tasmania where, for four years, I was engaged with others in the introduction of total ministry. I have valued greatly ongoing interaction and dialogue with total ministry practitioners from across the Anglican Communion, particularly New Zealand and North America. Dioceses like Northern Michigan and Nevada have a total ministry track record of several decades. At the present time, I am hoping to develop in a limited way a total ministry model in Knowle West within the current severe constraints of the Church of England ministry delivery, leadership and governance systems.

My main focus in Tasmania was on remote rural, mining, tourist and fishing communities. However, interest in the total ministry model was much more widespread and the impact of its development in the seven parishes that have developed it has rippled through the whole of the diocese. In recent months three 'viable' parishes decided to work together as one and have begun to restructure their life and mission along total ministry lines.

Total Ministry is built on the premise that the Holy Spirit is in charge of the church, not the clergy, not the laity. The Spirit's capacity to enable church to be the church in any given context, however small the number of participants, is an essential tenet of total ministry.

Total Ministry is built on an unwavering confidence and trust in the Holy Spirit who indwells God's people and the churches of which they are a part, and who moves within and between members building them up for the work of ministry, transforming them and creating new possibilities. In other words, people who have the Spirit never have the Spirit alone but in community, for they are called to reflect and act together. Those who engage in Total Ministry regularly describe the experience as an exciting adventure, an exploration, a journey together that's lots of fun.

In total ministry we use the ellipse instead of the pyramid to depict the church we are becoming. It has two interrelated focal points: the church's **life** and the church's **mission** in everyday life. Around the edge is the leadership team. Mutuality in leadership and in ministry together is seen as the heart of Christian community. The ellipse is porous, with ease of movement in and out, the community seeks always to be open and welcoming. (see the diagram below)



The basic shape of Total Ministry

- The church sets itself to become fully indigenous, interdependent and self-sustaining
- Total ministry is developed in a series of stages similar to those used in the Catechumenate – the congregation journeys from **Inquiry** (exploration of total ministry) to **Formation** (skill development, team building) to **Preparation** (calling, commissioning, ordaining and calling again) to **Reflection** (settling down to sustain ministry for the long haul). Transitions between stages are marked by liturgical celebration.
- The church shapes its life as a ministering community in which, potentially, every member shares. Every baptised member, every follower of Christ, has received gifts for ministry which he or she is called to offer in the life and mission of the church and the churches task is to identify them, call them forth and into use and develop them – the strategy is mutual ministry development, not clerical ministry delivery, not team ministry delivery
- Leadership is exercised collectively, usually through a local ministry support team called by the congregation and authorised by the bishop – no-one is alone in ministry, no-one is alone in leadership
- The task of leadership is not the exercise of power **over** others or the exercise of ministry **instead of** others but the exercise of power and ministry **with** others
- The task of the leadership team is to draw together a common vision among the people and help members individually and collectively to realise their potential
- The offices of priest and deacon (Ordained Local Ministers) are filled by persons identified and called by and from the congregation. (Note: unless these offices are used as part of a total ministry model all we will end up with is a cheaper version of the old clergy-dominated, money-dependent ministry model).
- The community is usually supported by a person ordained or lay (usually stipendiary) who journeys alongside the community serving as companion enabler, midwife and mentor.
- Enablers offers encouragement, training and professional support. They act as a link with the diocese and constantly urge the community to look outwards
- Learning takes place in community. The church is shaped as a learning community and deep learning and gift development happens through reflection on events in the stream of church life and mission and daily life
- Learning, education, training and formation opportunities are provided, as much as possible, locally in partnership with the diocese
- Each person is encouraged to take full responsibility for their learning and to see themselves as a life long learner
- Before total ministry officially begins, the whole congregation is 'examined' to discern its readiness, less emphasis is placed on individuals; it's the community that must 'pass' the exam.

- Candidates for ordained offices are not extracted from the community and sent away for formation, their basic training and formation for priestly and diaconal ministry takes place in the community of faith.
- When ready, the whole congregation/parish is commissioned for total ministry by the bishop at a special service. In that service the ministry support team is commissioned and priests and deacons are ordained. There is no separation of clergy from laity.
- Because total ministry involves radical changes in theology and in the organisation of church life it is essential to recall frequently what it is about. The Reflection stage is marked by regular reviews of the life of the congregation in total ministry.

Ordained Local Ministry in a Total Ministry Context

I have deliberately left ordained local ministry until the end because total ministry sets it in its rightful place, as part of rather than separate from the ministry of the baptised.

Tom Ray points out that for many congregations the three-fold order of ministry has little reality. Deacons are virtually non-existent and bishops rarely seen or known. And so, priests/vicars have *accumulated to themselves an impossible web...of all three orders*. One person comes to represent apostolic oversight, priestly and diaconal ministry. The outcome has been exaggerated expectations placed on incumbents and a separation and fragmentation of sacramental life and theology.⁵

In Total Ministry the ordained offices are reconnected with the ministry of the baptised.

The ministry of a deacon is to serve as a sign, a constant reminder to church members of the call of all to servant ministry in Christ in their daily lives. Deacons point to the call of Christ to live and share the Good News and seek God's peace and justice in everyday life in society.⁶

The ministry of priest is to reveal and remind the whole community of the baptised of their ministry in everyday life of reconciliation, of blessing and forgiving, of the breaking down of barriers that separate and isolate people from God, each other, and from Creation, and of the ministry of gathering people into community. The priests task is to remind the community of their call to feed and reflect on God's word and to live and speak that word in their daily lives.

Priests help us see that reconciling with our spouse or asking forgiveness for being sarcastic to a child is our priestly ministry of reconciliation, our baptismal ministry. Priests help us see hurt and isolation and segregation and say, 'I am sorry, forgive me.' Priests help us see that judges and probation officers, and schoolteachers and labour mediators have a ministry of reconciliation. Priests gather us around the Lord's table so that the Jesus who died to reconcile us to God can nourish us.

The ministry of bishop, the ministry of apostle and oversight, education and witness reminds the community of the church of their ministry of oversight, education and witness reaching into homes, workplaces, neighbourhoods and community groups and expressed in the right management and care of the environment.

Ray says that the absence of at least two of these ministries, deacon and bishop, from the local church has disabled the church's ministry internally and externally. The road back to wholesome three-fold order practice, he says, is through the introduction and development of total mutual ministry of the baptised led by a ministry support team called to serve as reminders of the meaning of baptismal living.

⁵ See Thomas K Ray, *ibid.* 'The Small Church'

⁶ It is not by chance that it is the deacon who is named in the rubric of the liturgy of the Eucharist to read the Gospel, organises intercessions and dismisses the people with the words, *go in peace to love and serve the Lord*. CW, p. 158.

In this paradigm **the stipendiary person** is finally liberated to function in a wholesome way, as the companion enabler of the community of faith as it develops ministry in everyday life and in the life of the gathered community.

Ordained local ministry that is exercised in the context of a local ministry support team and the ministry of the whole people of God takes ordained ministry out of the stronghold of the professionals and gives it back to the whole people of God. It provides full and ready access to the sacraments without reliance upon the scarce resource of the itinerant professional.

There are important implications for the training and formation of 'ordained local ministers' be they deacons or priests. Formation and training is no longer undertaken through a separate specialised programme for a select few who are withdrawn from the community for several years of intensive education. It is reintegrated into the life of the local church and carried out alongside the formation of others for ministry.

Conclusion

I trust that the foregoing has demonstrated adequately the challenge that we face on our estates and more widely in the Church of England.

There is much talk today about mission-shaped church and there is little doubt we have now entered a new missionary Post-Christendom era. But what is the best church shape for mission? I am suggesting that a dependent church, indeed even an independent church, can never be fully or effectively missional, interdependence must be our goal.

Rowan Williams, in a recent address to a mission-shaped church conference said that, *'church is the name we give to those networks, those places, those relationships which embody the event of the new creation. The church is what happens when Jesus is there, received and recognised. This is the principle against which we have to try and test all our attempts to be the church.'*

The criteria to test church structures, Williams says, is *whether the way people behave, relate, make rules and worship in the church speak of the new creation; whether they let the event of encounter with Jesus happen afresh?* Thankfully, people do encounter Christ in (in spite of?) our current structures. I'm not disputing that. But I also know that many are prevented from encounter because of our current ministry delivery systems, governance and leadership structures.

I have heard stories from many who have developed Total Ministry and they are stories of encounter with Jesus, of new creation, of extraordinary growth, health and vitality in many different directions, growth, health and vitality that was absent before they embarked on the journey. Their stories, their witness, remain for me a major incentive to attempt Total Ministry here.

Some useful references:

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- Rowan Williams, 23 June 2004, *Keynote Address, Mission-shaped church conference*, London and available on the internet.