



Leading Lights

Who can lead new churches?

Lay leaders exist across the spectrum of emerging churches. As many as one third of church plants have been lay led. Is this a welcome throwing off of the shackles of clericalism? Does it work? **George Lings** wanted to find out and uncovered deeper disturbing questions.

Also available in the Encounters on the Edge series

- No.1 *LIVING PROOF -
A new way of being Church?*
- No.2 *UNIT 8 -
Out of sight, out of nothing*
- No.3 *CELL CHURCH PLANTING -
Has Church reached its Cell Buy Date?*
- No.4 *ETERNITY -
The beginning*
- No.5 *JOINING THE CLUB -
Or changing the rules?*
- No.6 *ACROSS THE POND -
Beyond control and security*
- No.7 *NEW CANTERBURY TALES
Network Church Plants*
- No.8 *THAME OR WILD?
Planting multiple congregations*



ChurchArmy

The Sheffield Centre, 50 Cavendish Street, Sheffield S3 7RZ.

Tel: 0114 272 7451 Fax: 0114 279 5863

Email: g.lings@sheffieldcentre.org.uk



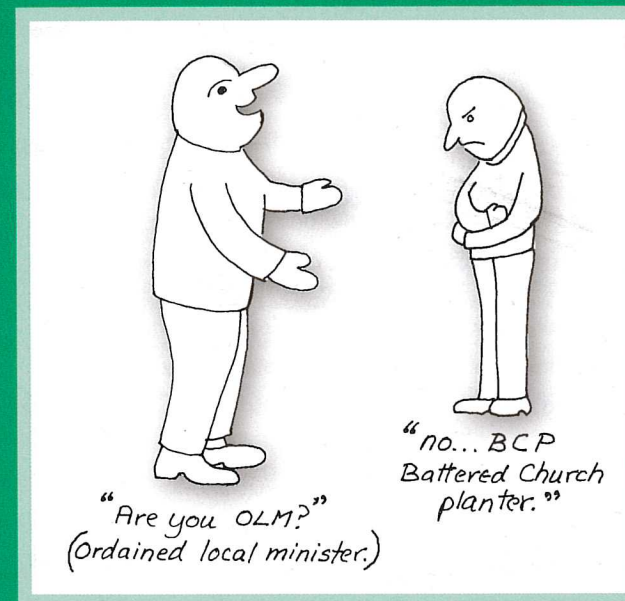
ChurchArmy

Encounters on the Edge

A Series of Quarterly Investigations from

The Sheffield Centre

No. 9



Leading Lights

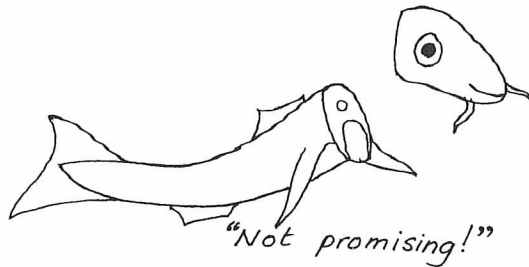
Who can lead new churches?

Leading Lights

Who can lead new churches?

Part one : A Leading Question

Virtually every writer today on change in organisations insists that leadership is the single crucial issue. This perception seems common to business, media, education and politics; it occupies the military, the voluntary sector and the Church. In a period of unremitting change, effective leadership is core curriculum within a wider list of factors. I think of the subversive book title,

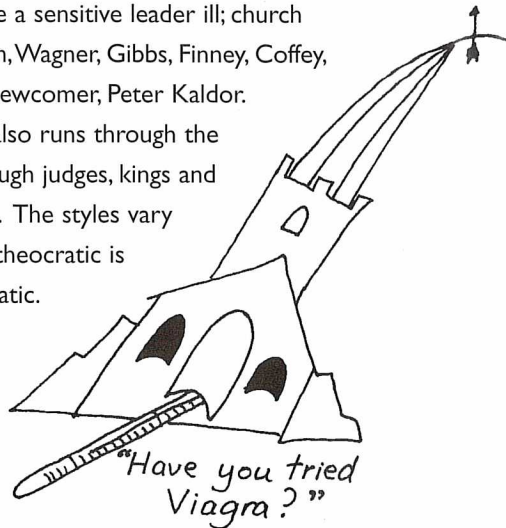


"The Fish Rots from the Head" subtitled *"The Learning Organisation"* by Bob Garrett. I note the investment that organisations make in leadership recruitment, training and development.

There are now so many medicines on how to become a healthy church, that trying to take them all would make a sensitive leader ill; church "doctors" include Schwarz, Warren, Wagner, Gibbs, Finney, Coffey, Hall & Mountford and Australian newcomer, Peter Kaldor.

Leadership of the people of God also runs through the biblical narrative from Moses, through judges, kings and prophets, to Jesus and his apostles. The styles vary from regal to servant, though the theocratic is far more evident than the democratic.

Leadership is an inescapable issue, complicated by calls from rival camps; do you re-emphasise the priestly or the preaching, the



manager or missionary, the directional or consensual, the provider or enabler, the pastor or spiritual director? All have their advocates and their place.

Who leads churches and how they lead is firmly on the agenda. It matters for existing churches as they navigate the storms and shoals of the demise of Christendom, the drift from churches and a reduction of resources. Courage and change-enabling skills will be to the fore, held in tension with the humility and grace required of servant leadership, as well as the security and wisdom to enable and empower the gifts of the local church for Kingdom ministry in the Church and the world.

Leadership matters perhaps even more for an emerging church. It cannot sit back and relax, reclining in the chair of its past. Perching on a stool of the present, it only has the choice to continue to balance or to fall off. A young church lives by its wits on the edge of the current Church. **Its resources are its vision, its vitality, its members and its leaders.**

Who are leading the new forms of church?

Are we making good decisions about who is deployed for these ventures? How do they fare? Does the wider system encourage or constrain? Hard data about new forms of church and who leads them is less reliable than in the middle 1990's. The picture I paint across the strands is detailed in part, but impressionistic in others. **I am struck by a variety that has some logic behind the evidence and anecdote.**

- Many in the **Alternative Worship** scene want to avoid the very language of "leader", as too directive and potentially exploitative. Typically the Website list gives no formal indicator of leader, just a contact point. However, from leaders I have met, or know by reputation, some are clergy, some lay, many part-time or voluntary.
- There is a database for Church of England Cell churches kept by ACPI, of which I have an authorised copy. The 39 churches transitioning to **Meta** or **Cell** are virtually all vicar or priest-in-charge led, for unless the leader has fully accepted the values, the change can't be seen through. The 10 beginning parallel Cell churches alongside existing congregational ones is the most variable pattern of ordained and lay. Conversely, the few Cell plants

from scratch have been led by those with strong evangelistic gifts - e.g. Church Army Officers such as Roy Hollands in Leicester, Martin Garner in Lisburn, N Ireland (Encounters No.3) or a Priest in Charge, Kerry Thorpe (Encounters No.7).

- **Community Development** based plants most of all require specialised appropriate skills. In some cases, lay leaders have been ordained, as with Gill James and David Treharne at *Living Proof* (Encounters No.1). In others, Church Army personnel like Conrad Parsons led the work in Blackheath (Encounters No.6). In yet others, Clergy, with community skills from previous careers, lead. The key pioneer quality is skill not leader status.
- **Multiple Congregations** seem to be led by assistant clergy, NSM/OLMs or Readers, depending on who is available. The skills of public worship, together with fronting and fostering a community are the initial tasks.
- The current group of **Network plants** is virtually exclusively clergy led - the exceptions I know being directly overseen by a clergy person, though day to day running is led by a lay team. I sense it takes an ordained leader in good standing with the Diocese concerned, to gain permissions to start this kind of Church plant; clergy can be held directly accountable through licence and ministerial review in a way that a voluntary lay person might not.
- Some churches are changing to include varying degrees of elements of the **Seeker** approach. As the Seeker model needs significant creative and human resources, they tend to be churches large enough to have their own clergy, though working through teams to plan seeker events.
- **Transplants** are those plants that (with permission) crossed a boundary, rescued a dormant congregation, inherited a church building and are, by virtue of size and missionary thrust, the senior partners in the venture. The leadership choice was a curate with clout, who then became the new priest in charge or vicar. This was in order to secure the permissions, to offer the focus of leadership for an incoming group often more than 50 strong, to be able to offer a full range of services from day one and to gain credibility in the area. The HTB plants best represent this model. Virtually all have flourished vigorously, leading to further reproduction and sending out with the same church DNA.

- **Youth congregations** - as opposed to youth worship services - naturally draw youth workers, who though trained and salaried, at present tend not to be ordained.

- This leaves what quizzically is becoming known as the **Traditional church plant**. Let me stereotype it as one that serves a geographical area and tries to reach a span of age ranges. It was begun by a group of small congregation size, sent out by the Parish church. Most typically, it meets in a secular venue such as a school or community centre within the parish. There have been scores, perhaps over a hundred, of these plants since 1984 when I began gathering information. A wide variety of leaders have been in post.

Anecdote and statistics suggest that by the late 1990's about a third, perhaps more, of the whole variety church plants were lay led. Of those, one quarter were Church Army Officers (who constitute a special case), another quarter were Readers, and the other half were Lay Workers with varying degrees of license, training and salary. In such an uncoordinated grassroots movement, itself a response to a struggling and under-resourced Church, considerable variety is unsurprising.

The Lay Revolution

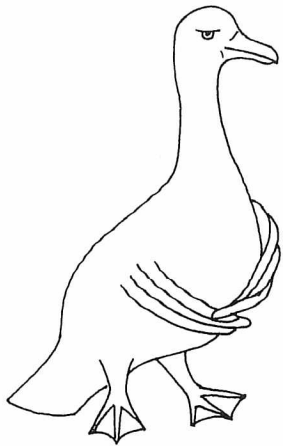
Since the 1960's, we have been swept along by this change. Two early markers were "*One People*" by John Stott and "*Layman's Church*" edited by John Robinson then Bishop of Woolwich. Nearly forty years later, some of their quotations would be incredible in some quarters but yet still apt in others. Take a famous one from John Lawrence, when still editor of the long defunct journal "*Frontier*".

"What does the layman really want? He wants a building that looks like a church; a clergyman dressed in a way he approves; services of the kind he has been used to; and to be left alone"

Or John Robinson

"... the organisation of our church should not be such as to allow every ordained man within about seven years of his ordination thereafter to become a permanent thermostat to his congregation, so that the temperature of the church can never rise above his own spiritual, moral or intellectual temperature"

"Laymans Church" p16



“GOLDEN EGGS were not in the job description”

The Ministry of the Laity, as the vocation of all the baptised, has been championed by such sources as *“Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”* (The Lima Document). Collaborative Ministry language has obtained PC status in church life. In the 1990's forms of Ministry Leadership Teams came into many dioceses, such as Canterbury and Liverpool. I recently obtained details of a similar scheme for Ministry Development Teams in Durham Diocese. There are **great gains:** recovery of plurality in leadership, the

recognition of a wider range of gifts in local people, the releasing of their ministries to serve in the Church and in the world, the visible modelling of team as female and male, as ordained and lay, and the blessings of allowing specialisation. **All these are blows of an axe laid at the foot of the tree of clericalism.** The laity are no longer “done to”, they are those who “can do”. The growth of diocesan strategy documents (helpfully reviewed in ABM Ministry Paper No.18) and attendant schemes to train and recognise various locally ordained and lay ministries, chime in with this rising chorus. In the south where I served for 22 years, I believe Southwark pioneered pastoral assistants, Rochester saw the rise of accredited evangelists and Canterbury had a scheme for those in the healing ministry.

The sheer shortage of clergy and money for stipendiary posts has been the backdrop, evident to some since the early 60's. Necessity, theological conviction, democratisation of church government, discrediting of clergy in social life and the death of the old professional class dominance, all conspire to make and keep the laity centre stage.

David Bosch writing in 1991 concluded

“A missionary encounter with the West will have to be, primarily, a ministry of the laity.”

Believing in the Future p 59

He cited two reasons. Firstly, the Church's witness will be more credible if it comes from those who do not belong to the guild of pastors, as the professionalization of ordained ministry makes them an “in crowd”. Secondly, only in this way will we bring together what our culture has divided, the private and public spheres, which colludes with our own false spiritual v. secular divide.

With such high expectations, a culture of permission for what laity can do and churches being born for which clergy provision did not exist, lay leadership was inevitable. Can such patterns be sustained? **The stories that follow speak of sprinting power but not middle distance stamina.** I did not realise, even five years ago, that I would see cases where the enthusiasm for the start could not be continued. In the Decade of Evangelism, the Church has heard it said, in the name of discovering the future, that “we should let a thousand flowers bloom”. I favour the creativity and freedom that sentiment confers, but I fear that in practice the flowers turned out to be people. Some of them have burnt out, either crushed by heavy expectations, or frustrated

that what was begun has not been allowed to mature. Often the flowers have not been weeded or watered and then we wondered why they wilted. Perhaps we have had to experiment, but I hope we shall not fail to learn. **In the tough mission climate of contemporary Britain, I believe we are being pressed to make a better match of the mission resources to the mission task. The key human mission resource is the leader.**



Let 100 flowers die.

Many questions stem from “who can lead a church plant?”. The stories among so called traditional church plants are instructive because they have been around the longest. They give us clues as to what happens after the initial years in a new form of church. Of the other eight types on the list above, each have a particular character and culture in order to fulfil a particular mission.

However, if they are churches too, they will have an ongoing communal life and many of the following questions will come and visit them.

- Can a lay led venture be a church?
- Can part time leadership work?
- What about sacramental provision at new forms of church?
- What difference does a managerial or artisan culture make?
- How much of an answer is the trend towards OLM?
- Is the problem lack of leadership or the demands of the Church?

Part two : The Lead stories

What's the picture with the lay led church plant - has it been for better or for worse? Last summer I met the leaders of a church plant from Christ Church Chilwell in South West Nottingham. The story that unravelled seemed to me to be typical of a number I had heard of by repute, so I mentally squirreled it away and it emerged from my subconscious with this issue. I now fear all readers of Encounters will be hesitant to tell me anything for fear of what might befall them!

A good start

Pathway is a plant started for good reason and in a fairly healthy fashion. A part of the parish not so well covered was spotted by a process of prayerful planning, springing from a PCC away day in 1996. It is a distinct geographical area of 1970's mixed housing, including bought up Local Authority properties and prosperous owner occupied dwellings. It is served by a primary school and the area already had a long history of Sunday school work, unusually including a Pathfinder group, but the leaders were not closely tied into the parish church. A parish working group was established and external consultancy employed. The call for a planting team drew 30 adults and their children, most of whom were from the target area. A core planning team of 3 was formed who worked well together, including Paul Lawlor and Margaret Swan (above). This



led to wider ownership of the project by the rest of the team, the working through of the necessary grafting of the plant onto the stock of the existing Sunday school work. As I heard the story live, I noted that even then the term "leadership" was not used and a detached managerial style from the sending church was dominant. Here were seeds of what would arise.

Running well

The launch at the school did not quickly draw people as hoped, but over time it attracted returners to the faith, including parents of the Sunday school members and other adults through friendship. This would fit with the admission that none in the planning team had evangelistic gifts, but that the church was good at promoting events that were early sowing strategies. (See the helpful slim volume "*Sowing Reaping Keeping*" by Laurence Singlehurst explaining a rationale for, and cases of, sowing one and sowing two activities, before attempting reaping). Thus *Pathway* began to grow and in the life cycle of churches analogy, moved from infancy to teenage quite rapidly. The Eskdale



school venue (above) was satisfactory, with a member on the school governing body and the twin planting horrors, over present caretakers and ever absent cupboards, never surfaced. *Pathway* were covering day to day costs, but putting all their finances through the sending church made that area of their own life insufficiently visible and so not motivating.