

Developing Leadership in a Changing Church - Introduction

Aims

Developing Leadership in a Changing Church is a person-centred course, which does not lean on a single model for leadership, seeking instead to offer participants a range of tools to explore their own preferred personal leadership style as well as the context of their ministry. In particular it seeks to help participants to adopt a reflective approach, which will enable them to be more flexible in choosing appropriate leadership strategies. In other words, the purpose of the course is not to give a single definition of leadership, but to help participants to lead better in whatever way is appropriate to them and their situation. Hence the two parts of the title: *developing leadership* in a *changing church*. At the end of the course participants will have gained greater awareness of how they lead and how they might do it differently, as well as a renewed confidence in God's call to them as ministers.

Background

'Developing Leadership in a Changing Church' began in 2003, based on material originally produced in Oxford Diocese. Initially a joint venture between Birmingham, Lichfield and Coventry dioceses, Hereford diocese has sent participants to the last three courses and some have also come from Gloucester diocese. Upwards of 120 clergy have now attended.

Course Structure

The course lasts a year and begins with an introductory day in June at Offa House, near Leamington Spa. This gives participants the opportunity to meet one another and their tutors as well as introducing them to the questionnaires, which are a key part of the course.

The questionnaires are confidential. No copies are retained by the sponsoring diocese. Each participant receives nine questionnaires, of which one is self-scored and the remaining eight are distributed by the participants to respondents from their parishes. The questionnaire returns are anonymous and ratings for the participants' performance and the respondents' view of the relative priority of the tasks rated are collated and returned at a private debriefing session before the first residential. This process enables some real feedback arrived at in a trustworthy manner.

The First Residential takes place in October or November and is split between some whole group input and three long sessions spent in action learning sets. At the end of this residential, participants choose a project as a focus for their reflection on their own leadership in the context of their parish and agree it with the rest of their action learning set. In the spring, individuals work on their chosen project and meet in action learning sets once. The Second Residential in June includes further input and the presentation of projects in action learning sets, outlining what they have learned through the process.

Who is it for?

Experience tends to suggest that Developing Leadership in a Changing Church works best for people who are close to a transition point in their ministry (as the *Mind the Gap* report suggested was the case for all CME). It remains effective for its original target group of those who had been in post as incumbents for the first time for a period of between eighteen months and two years, but it is also helpful for those, for example, who are

acquiring a fresh set of parish responsibilities in addition to existing ones (as is the case with pastoral reorganisations) or who have reached a new stage in their long-term ministry in one place. It also can have a role to play with those who are perhaps five or six years away from retirement and realise that they are unlikely to move, giving them an opportunity to refocus their ministry and that of their parish during that time. While primarily geared to incumbents, some sector ministers (diocesan advisers, HE chaplains) have completed the course and benefited from it.

Learning Methods

A major feature of the course is Action Learning Sets. In these groups of four or five, with a course staff member as facilitator, participants follow a shared journey over the period of a year. The sets are cross-diocesan, so participants are not working with people they already know and meet often, and within the set confidentiality is strictly observed and each participant is given equal time. The quality of relationships and the level of support generated is remarkable. In evaluations the majority of participants score the action learning sets as the most valuable aspect of the course.

The course aims not be prescriptive in the input that is offered, seeking rather to stimulate and encourage debate and discussion. The project which participants pursue between the two residentials involves observing and reflecting on the leadership style used in work which is already being done rather than being specifically new (though in many cases participants use it as a means to develop a project which they have been aiming to begin for a while). Journalling is encouraged as part of the reflective process and some free time is also safeguarded and encouraged.

A key theme is exploring and being given the time to do so. This and the associated reflective emphasis make it hard to produce definite statements of learning outcomes from the course, since its aim is to foster 'soft' skills of empathy, sensitivity, co-operation and personal development. Within the action learning sets, especially in the final residential, however, the groups have often developed to the point where sharp questions and challenges can be made and received within a highly supportive environment. In this sense the course is more like encouraging someone to make long-term changes to their lifestyle as opposed to the shorter-term and more immediately noticeable effect of going on a diet.

Following the Call

Vocational issues frequently emerge, often around the question, 'What kind of leader is God calling me to be?' For participants it is important that their post should fit with their vocation but also that their vocation should not be exhausted by their current post. In particular in the last few years issues of priesthood have been raised: what are the differences between leadership and priesthood and what are the connections? No formula answer is given but each participant is encouraged to come to their own conclusions.

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