

Matthew Hale Public Library Lecture  
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## CHANGING LEADERSHIP FOR A CHANGING CHURCH

### I. A Whole New Era

Helpful to put where we are at present into a wider perspective.

Four great eras of the Christian church:

- 500 years up unto the fall of Rome
- 500 years up to the great Schism
- 500 years up to the great Reformation
- 500 years up to the great Emergence

Another way to describe it:

- Ancient period
- Medieval period
- Modern period
- Post Modern period

The Anglican Church is a product of the Reformation – a turning point in human/Christian history.

- It spread through the Empire
  - Through Prayer Book/Bible in Language
  - Migration
  - Mission
  - Use of communication tools of that era - Communication revolution

Many would suggest we're on edge or in midst of start of a whole new era:

- Phyllis Tribble calls it the "Great Emergence"
  - Something new is emerging
  - Something new needs to emerge

In our churches we have people who are:

- Pre-modern - Grandparents
- Modern - Parents
- Emerging - Kids/Youth

Is this the beginning of a whole new mission era?

- Many are suggesting so.
- Happening in 2/3rds World, what about the West?

## 2. The Adaptive Challenge

*‘... strictly speaking one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it. This ought to be the case because of the abiding tension between the church’s essential nature and its empirical condition ... That there were so many centuries of crisis-free existence for the Church was therefore an abnormality ... And if the atmosphere of crisislessness still lingers on in many parts of the West, this is simply the result of a dangerous delusion. Let us also know that to encounter crisis is to encounter the possibility of truly being the Church.’ [David Bosch, “Transforming Mission”]*

David Bosch’s statement brilliantly captures the dilemma of the church in Australia/the West. In many mainline churches there were many decades where the same model seemed to work in most places. There was an accepted pattern and tradition, reinforced by legislation and prayer books, or by traditions passed from generation to generation. As the church in the West now operates in a largely post-Christendom context, that approach has been progressively breaking down over the past 50 years. As a consequence, many individual churches/denominations/associations are in crisis.

Alan Hirsch in “The Forgotten Ways” argues that the church in the West is facing what is ‘an adaptive challenge’. According to system theory, an organism (or organization) is challenged to change or adapt in order to improve its chance of survival. The adaptive challenge can come from two possible sources: (1) a situation of significant threat or (2) a situation of compelling opportunity; or both. The threat for established churches is from the rapid social change of the era we’re living in and the need to find new ways forward.

My experience from the past seven and a half years as an Anglican bishop of a large area with 70 parishes and 130 clergy in suburbia with a rural fringe, is that the challenges are multiple and the ways forward are varied and complex. Our challenge has usually been to help many churches to move back to better health. In reality though, the bigger issue is how to become more missionally effective. In my opinion this is the biggest challenge for all churches today, whether big, small, mainline or independent, seemingly strong or weak. All of this will require a significant shift in the leadership culture that is pre-dominant in many churches and church organization. We live in exciting, yet perplexing times. Some would argue we are on the cusp of a major new mission era. Anglican Bishops have to regain a New Testament vision of being apostolic leaders of mission. There is no longer room for the ‘Prince Bishop’ or simply running a tidy organisation if we are to go forward as a denomination.

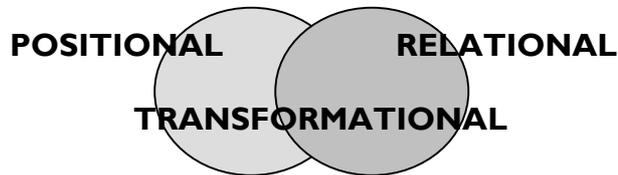
Hirsch points to the work of Harvard’s Ronald Heifetz who distinguished between ‘technical (i.e. operational) leadership’ and ‘adaptive leadership’.

*“Operational leadership entails the exercise of authority and is entirely appropriate at times of stability and equilibrium. It works best when you can draw on existing models or approaches to respond to a situation.” [Pascale, Millemann and Gioja, “Surfing the Edge of Chaos”]*

Operational leadership fits well in established churches where there is an emphasis on pastoral care and teaching with a range of programs to cater for various age groups. It is a form of keeping on keeping on in a steady manner.

Adaptive leaders appreciate the nature of the crisis and the change required. They help their congregation/organization become aware of the nature of the challenge and then seek to work with their people to find new ways forward together. They don't have to have all the answers, but are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to go forward.

Mark McCrindle has described the need for a changed approach to leadership.



He says we need to get the balance right with effective leadership being expressed by living out the four “R’s”:

- Real – open and accessible
- Relevant – connected into the culture
- Responsive – engaging with context and community
- Relational – actively connecting with people/groups

*[McCrindle address to Melbourne Diocesan Ministry Conference, June 2009]*

Leadership today can't simply rely upon the status of the office or formal allegiance to the Institution. People want leaders who are real and honest; relevant to our culture yet able to connect it to the Biblical story; responsive to what's going on and yet able to present a vision; relational and accessible.

### **3. Ways Forward for Mainline Churches**

For a mainline church like the Anglican church, I want to suggest we need a new style of leadership in order to become a missional church.

#### **(1) A Big Mission Vision**

Most local parishes suffer from a lack of vision. Most Australian Dioceses have or don't have a clearly enunciated vision. Leaders – either bishops, clergy or lay leaders - need to work together to pray and discern God's vision for his church generally and their particular community of faith. Leonard Sweet has described this as “*From institutional 'Here-I-Stand' Churchianity (Maintenance) to 'There-We-Go' Christianity (Mission).*” [Sweet, “*Soul Tsunami*”] Unfortunately it is true to say that most churches are internally self-pre-occupied and self-concerned. In spite of this, I believe that at present the Spirit is blowing to urge and inspire us to radically change from being “Come To” churches to become “Go To” churches.

Our churches must be ‘mission driven’ rather than ‘ministry driven’. The old distinction between ministry and mission – ministry is service **to** me, while mission is service **through** me – is as good today as when it was first introduced.

People will increasingly want to be part of a community of faith that has a sense of emerging clarity of how we're participating together in the mission of God in our context (local), in our city (regional), in our nation (national) and internationally (global). They will want to be able to participate in this mission and not just sit passively in the pews. The Mission Shaped Church and the responses to it provide an excellent theological and practical basis to responding to this challenge.

## **(2) Orthodox and Contemporary**

Leaders today need to be thoroughly and thoughtfully grounded in the tradition of the faith and yet able to communicate it with passion and relevance. The churches that are growing are nearly always led by ministers who are thoroughly orthodox and have strong pulpit ministries. They are committed to teaching the faith, grounded in Scripture and yet connecting it to the reality of people's lives. They strive to be both reformed and yet relevant.

The big challenge in all of this is discipleship. The whole process of disciple making – from evangelism to formation as new Christians to growing in maturity in Christ. This will be actively embraced by and expressed by lay people, in children's, youth, young adult and adult small group programs. Unfortunately most traditional churches don't do small groups, yet they are critical contexts for discipleship.

## **(3) Pro-active and Risk Taking**

The pastoral model of leadership has been dominant in the Anglican church for decades. This is very much a reactive, responsive approach. Most Anglican bishops and clergy have been schooled in this model and are at home with it. While the model has its strengths, it isn't a good basis for leading a healthy church let alone becoming a missional church.

Peter Corney often distinguished between maintenance and leadership:

- Maintenance is producing order and consistency, caring for and supporting people. Keeping things going. It minimizes risk. It has a short time frame. (Exodus 18:13-27)
- Leadership creates vision, matures, inspires, creates movement, builds an organisation's culture and ethos, takes risks, has a longer time frame. (Exodus 33:7-23)

Management without leadership produces maintenance.

Leadership without management can be derailed into costly mistakes.

Most Anglican leaders are inclined more to maintenance than leadership. We need a new style of leadership which is pro-active not reactive, and is willing to take risks in order to find ways to go forward together. I sense that there is genuine impatience for this type of leadership to be expressed. At present we suffer from a distinct lack of good role models at a Diocesan and parochial level.

## **(4) Controlled Release and Releasing Control**

The new style of leader needed today will involve a dogged resolve to be purposeful and yet a relaxed openness to the Spirit's leading. This sort of leader must be clear and uncompromising in leading the church to live out in the missional mindset. At the same time, as the mindset catches hold, the leader must step back and let go. Leaders who attempt to control the expressions of missionality will always be tempted to control them, and thus suffocate them. This is a big issue for most Anglican bishops and clergy. We need to be honest, we like being in control and often stifle initiative because we have to keep control of what's happening.

Missional leaders will set the vision, offer training and guidance but release control to allow people to get on with it. Those mission initiatives will often be expressed in teams and will increasingly be lay initiated and lay led. If we do this we help parishioners to move from being consumers to producers.

Reverend Ian Weaver at St Matthew's East Geelong, Victoria, has sought to capture this by forming his church into clusters which band together to pray, dream and work together.

**(5) Change Leadership**

Leaders in any setting today will need to develop their skills in change management. It doesn't matter whether it is as bishop or minister of a small struggling church or a senior minister in a multi-congregational church. It is natural and easy for any group to grow complacent and to go through the motions. If churches are to become more missionally engaged this will require a sophisticated awareness of change, its impact and how to take people with you through major change. Clergy in the current era will increasingly have to be a part of this. There are very few comfortable and easy parishes left.

**(6) Counting the Cost**

Missional leadership will be costly. It was in the New Testament. It is today. Leaders who want to be purposeful and seek to help their Diocese, parish or congregation go forward will face resistance. Some of that resistance will be upfront and overt. Other times it will be covert and undermining. Healthy leaders will develop a range of support systems and accountability partners. They will hopefully work in a team.

Diocesan leadership is especially challenging as there are always people who are committed to power or preserving the status quo than to change. I used to call them 'the knockers, blockers and controllers'!

It is true to say that nothing great was ever built without prayer, hard work and determination. If the Anglican Church in Australia is to have a dynamic future, we will need this type of resilient leadership. Leadership that changes as the church changes.