

THE BACKGROUND AND
EXPERIENCE
OF
MINISTRY
IN
TODAY'S CHURCH



Patmos Companions
- the Celtic Order of St Columba

A parable...

Once upon a time there lived a group of people in a far-off land. A high and sturdy wall surrounded their village. There was no hope of their ever being able to see beyond the wall. The villagers grew anxious and insecure.

Then, one day, it was decided that a high tower should be built. From that tower it would be possible to see for miles around and become well acquainted with life beyond the confines of their village. So the people worked long and hard and constructed a fine tower and also a secure ladder leading to the pinnacle of the tower.

Only the leader was allowed to climb the ladder to the top of the tower and he did so each day at the appointed time. When he returned from the tower, the leader would share his experience with all the people and in that way they came to know what life was like over the wall.

As the years passed, the leader lost his facility for ladder climbing, and, worse still, the ladder began to fall into disrepair. Finally the people decided that it was too dangerous for the leader to ladder climb any longer, so...

- How do you think the story finished?
- What else can we do besides repair the ladder?

1. TRANSITION

What follows is not to arrive at a single all-satisfying definition of ministry but rather to examine a range of understandings with the accent being the common call to ministry of all the baptised.

In the past the term ministry was threatened by under-use - it referred exclusively to the ordained office of bishops, priests and deacons. Today, some would suggest, it is in danger of over-use. Some fear the word has become deflated - Everyone has a ministry!!

One thing is sure. Never has there been a fixed concept of ministry.

Instead, our training is rich with graphic demonstrations that teach how one does minister. Always, there has been the firm belief that the minister **represents** the Church at the most intense level of its life

Not so long ago, a pastoral helper was someone who accompanied you on a ramble through the countryside. Once, a pastoral assistant worked on a sheep station!

Ministry, in our age, is taking on a completely different shape before our eyes. We are in the midst of profound change/transition in the Church.

In the Church the most natural place to turn to find a minister is the parish and/or intentional faith community. However we name them, the number of lay people acting in pastoral ministry in parishes has been growing. /Some/ Most have worked in a voluntary capacity, /others/ some for salary or stipend; some work under a verbal agreement with little specification of tenure, conditions or benefits, others with a written and more developed contract. The scene has been so varied that it would be impossible to make any general statement that would be valid.

Within the Anglican Church today lay men and women are serving as members of pastoral teams; they are directors of religious education and pastoral planning; they are preparing adults and children for the reception of the sacraments. They are Eucharistic Assistants/Pastoral Assistants/Liturgical Assistants/Lay Readers sharing the Word of God and the Eucharist in the Church assembly and for the sick and the aged in homes and hospitals. They are involved in Chaplaincy ministry - in hospitals, in schools, on tertiary campuses, with migrants. Some preach retreats and act as spiritual directors. They work with groups large and small - they teach and facilitate. At times they lead and preach to a church congregation and a small number of non-ordained people lectures in our theological colleges. Others work at changing structures of injustice through facilitation, networking or advocacy.

There are many more that are ministering without giving it any official tag at all. Truly, the Spirit is very busily moving in our churches.

We know we are in a time of transition when it is impossible to name clearly the movements happening in our midst. Questions arise over things we once took for granted. Sorting

out the essentials from those that are culturally conditioned, and for one time only, is never easy. Everyone experiences great changes in a lifetime but the pace of change hurts some people whilst others are frustrated that change happens so slowly. Terms that are fuzzy in a time of transition can be preferable to those that are clearly defined prematurely. Flexibility is safeguarded and possibilities are not excluded. However, many find mental security in perceived certainty and 'infallibility' of scriptures, leaders or organisations.

Expansion of ministry in our contemporary Church is often hampered by the lack of a guiding and uniting vision, direction and theology, which includes all the faces and functions of ministry that our Church can offer and our world needs without sidelining, or diminishing the roles we know so well in ministry - those of bishop, priest, and deacon

2. MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

Since Christian ministry is of the Church and for the Kingdom, before exploring the word ministry we need to reflect, briefly, on our understanding of Church and Kingdom.

2.1 Church

If the minister represents the Church at the deepest level of life, what then is the Church? What comes to mind when you think of Church? The building? The, Bishops? Priests? Deacons? The People of God? Parish? Deanery? Diocese? Local? Global?

Actually the meaning includes all of these. It is the assembly of the whole people of God to share in Jesus' mission for the Kingdom. We are the Body of Christ. We are, together; the Church made visible in human faces and fragile structures.

2.2 Kingdom

Ministry is a vital function of Church but it does not begin and end with Church. Rather, ministry needs to be viewed in a much wider context that is mysterious, all-inclusive and hard to define. That is the Kingdom of God or the Reign of God. As well as being the context for ministry, the Kingdom is the source, inspiration, motivation and goal of ministry. There are no borders or signposts for the Kingdom but we know it exists when people are in right relationship with themselves, God, the world and one another. It is a Kingdom not only of 'holiness and grace, but of justice, love and peace' (from the Preface of Christ the King). It is based on the firm belief in God's unconditional love for each and every person especially those who are weak and poor. **Ministry is the way in which we carry out the mission of Jesus to bring about the Kingdom of God that lives among us and yet is still to come.**

2.3 Ministry

Ministry comes from the ordinary Greek word, *diakonia*, which means to serve or attend someone, for example to wait upon them at table. It is a very humble, down-to-earth word. At times, in the New Testament, *diakonia* means a particular kind of Church action (Romans 12:7 and at other times it is used as an umbrella term to refer to all the activities associated both with service and with the spreading of the gospel (Ephesians 4:12). In translation and wider usage it has lost much of its original sense (for example the Latin *officium* becomes 'office' and can bring quite different layers of meaning). Certainly ministry in its origins was active, urgent, servant-like. concrete and specific.

Ministry exists always and only for the sake of AN EVANGELISING mission. The Church's mission is derived from the mission within the Trinity, whereby Jesus of Nazareth is given to humanity and the Creator and Redeemer in turn send the Spirit. The Church is essentially apostolic, sent into the world as an assurance of the presence of God. Jesus reminds us that his presence is first of all as servant. *'I am among you as one who serves.'* (Luke 22:27).

When Jesus returned to Nazareth where he belonged and stood up in the synagogue he spoke of his mission and ministry in terms of a liberating and healing service. He chose these words:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Luke 4:18-19

In ministry we are called to carry on the mission of Jesus in the world. That mission is nothing less than the transformation of our hearts, our homes, our places of work and our world into what Jesus called the Kingdom of God.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Romans 12:1-8

A Scripture search on ministry indicates ideas, insights, stories, images and models for ministry. Here are some texts. You may find others.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and for and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love, **Ephesians 4:11-16**

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment'. When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, 'There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.' But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing. **Luke 13: 10-17**

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' He said. 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' **Luke 10:29-39**

Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4: 9-11

Passages such as these raise important questions such as:

- What Spirit is upon you?
- What good news do you have to preach?

- Who needs to be released?
- Who in your world cannot see?
- What prisoner is yearning for freedom?
- What graced moment can you proclaim?

3. EXPERIENCES OF MINISTRY

Where do we turn to find models of ministry? Where do we meet human faces and developing structures that will guide us?

While it is neither possible nor appropriate to return to the past, movements in ministry today are capturing something **of the breadth, energy, diversity and spirit that marked the beginnings of** our Church. We look backward not to return there, but to gain some energy and direction to fashion a new future. There are no blueprints for this future Church. We are making the maps as we go. We can locate some clues from past experiences and present realities, from human faces and changing structures.

3.1 Beginnings: Jesus and the Twelve

Jesus calls the Twelve to be his disciples. In response to their inquiries he invites the first of them to 'come and see' (John 1: 39) and they stayed that day. They are the living witnesses to Jesus' will and ministry.

When Jesus instructs the seventy-two disciples and sends them on their mission we can take his words as addressed, not just to them but to each of us (Luke 10:1-12).

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few, therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, and no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them. "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.' Luke 10:1-12

The Twelve disappear relatively quickly. What follows are travelling apostles, prophets and teachers. The Twelve were not just a group who set in motion a pattern of life and then handed it over to others, as if it were a founding Board of Directors. Rather, we can view the Twelve Apostles as key figures in a much larger, diverse community of communities who were searching together for ways to live out their faith in their Risen Lord in their culture and their time. In a sense, this *ekklesia*, this Church, this gathering of volunteers shows us not just how things were as they served, shared and celebrated but what the Kingdom of God will be like when the whole church will be gathered around the banquet table. They image the Kingdom and offer us some guide-lines. What we gain from them is a spirit, guidance and wisdom but not a programme for ministry.

3.2 Unity in diversity: the Body of Christ

In reading accounts of life in the early Christian communities we are immediately struck by the variety of ministries that we find. There is not one ministry. Instead there are many, distinct but not separate.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given

through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

(1 Corinthians 12:4- 1)

Each serves the Church in different ways, but all are for the building up of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

In Paul the community is described as a human body whose parts have different functions, but all work together for the good of the whole.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect: whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. (1 Corinthians 12: 12-26).

This he applies to the Church whose members have different roles to play in worship and life.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12.27-30).

3.3 Gifts of the Spirit

From another perspective Paul sees ministry as based on gifts of the spirit that come from Baptism. All possess gifts, different gifts for different ministries. These gifts are given for the common good. Each gift is understood in the light of the ministry of Jesus the servant (Luke 22:24-27).

Lists of gifts are given in various places in the letters of Paul (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Peter 4: 10-11). These gifts cover many areas of the life of the early Church community but they are not exhaustive or prescriptive. Some gifts are more important than others are. The accent seems to be on diversity, flexibility according to needs and gifts, and the involvement of all the faithful in ministry. The function of the lists is to offer some concrete examples.

Paul welcomes all ministerial gifts but he tends to play down the more sensational ones. He stresses those that publicly serve the gospel and the community.

All the ministries are grounded in charisms. Some charisms in each Christian lead to ministry. These gifts of service come to baptise men and women in various forms during their lives.

No matter what model of ministry we explore, we find that ministry arrangements did not always work out. There were difficulties, divisions and dissension aplenty. People took sides and had vested interests. Selfishness and greed were evident. It is obvious that they needed the correction of the community. Always, the life situation called for discipline, sacrifice and generosity. What does seem clear, though, is that no one was excluded, by status, gender or any other quality, from the opportunity to test his or her call to ministry.

A key principle of the early Church is summed up in St Paul's words to the Galatians:

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:28

Each of these models of ministry - the beginnings, the Body of Christ and the gifts of the Spirit - accent collaborative action and service for the community, not power and honour.

Early ministry in the Church can offer us guidelines for action into the future:

- Christian ministry is linked with some activity that serves some reality of grace in the community.
- It is not an elite office.
- Christian ministry is action in response to the needs of the community. Ministries grow out of gifts given to the community for service.
- It is not an imposed, external ritual. There is no gap between the title and the work of the ministry. Prophets speak, healers heal.
- Christian ministry is service beyond itself to the Kingdom of God.
- It is not there to serve itself
- Christian ministry is for each baptised person and each one has a different gift. Gifts of ministry are plentiful and diverse.
- It is not a gift given selectively or for the sake of the individual.

4. LEADERSHIP IN MINISTRY

In co-ordinating these gifts for service, the ministry of the ordained came gradually into existence. The well being of the Church calls for leadership and order. Ministry came **from the community, not just from the Twelve**. Power in the Church derives from the power of the risen Christ:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20.

Ministry is linked to humble service and yet, at the same time, the contribution of ministers in the Church is considered so lofty that they are called 'co-workers with God' (Colossians 4: 11).

There was always a ministry of leadership within the community but never in separation from a variety of other gifts. Nor was the gift of leadership in ministry referred to in exactly the same way always and everywhere. The roles of overseer, elder and servant seemed to give way to those of bishop, priest and deacon and this latter triad was given special emphasis from at least the third century onwards. In the first century there are a variety of ministers working with small communities and house churches. All the ministries arose as the minister developed and the needs of the communities demanded.

4.1 The faces of ministry in the first century

AD 45 - 70

Apostle
Prophet
Teacher

70 - 110

Bishop
Presbyter
Deacon

Movement from one group of ministers to the other was gradual. There was not a neat and clear transition from apostle, prophet and teacher to bishop, presbyter and deacon. Sometimes they coexisted. What remained constant was the purpose of all ministries, namely to build up the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

AD	27-30	The Ministry of Jesus
	30-45	Ministry in the first communities, Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus. Ministers: prophet, presbyter
	45-70	In the gentile churches by the Twelve. Ministers: teacher, prophet, and apostle
	70-110	Ministers: bishop, presbyter, and deacon

4.1.1 Bishop

The terms guardian, presbyter and bishop were sometimes used interchangeably. Presbyter means elder. It is Jewish in expression and universal in theme. Elders or presbyters often formed an advisory group to the king. In Numbers 11:16-18 we find Moses gathering the group of seventy elders.

Elders were ordained by the laying on of hands. Though not connected with the central symbol of power, the Temple, they received great power and the capacity to pass on that power to others. They became the Sanhedrin of the Gospel. Collectively known as the Presbyterate, it was their duty to judge, guide and preside over courts and the local community, and raise funds. Sent out to carry messages, promote piety and learning, presbyters possessed a great air of authority. They had the status of official ambassadors from the centre, Jerusalem.

Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem Sanhedrin to Antioch, in Syria to form a community around the prophets and charismatic figures. The usual practice was that after the travelling apostles moved on, local people took over the leadership.

Corinth was a Church where many abuses and difficulties seemed to creep in. Yet, it is interesting to note that Paul in writing to them does not single out any one leader as more responsible than any other. The people as a whole are held responsible.

The Church met with persecutors and heresies and had to cope with the delay of the Second Coming. They looked for direction and guidance. There was concern to create norms, to write them down and to centralise the source of leadership, eventually in a single person, the bishop.

In Philippi and Ephesus the ruling elder-presbyter body began to stand out. In the Pastoral Epistles (1, 2 Timothy and Titus) the guardian or bishop is quite distinct from the elder-presbyter. As there was greater emphasis on the need for stability, the office of bishop was favoured by the gentile churches (Philippians 1:1) and that of elder by those Churches on Palestinian soil.

The bishop's role became more and more important. Gradually, the bishop became head not just of one community but of several (a diocese). As responsibility and the size of the task grew so too did the privileges and status symbols that attached to the office. Formerly teachers, prophets and wandering apostles were all part-timers who, while they were responding to the call to ministry, were earning a living (Paul, Priscilla and her husband Aquila are leaders in the Church community, cf. Romans 16:3-4, and we learn from Acts 18:3 that the three of them work as tentmakers). There was no split between the so-called sacred and secular aspects of their lives.

By the third century bishops were wearing distinctive dress though Ambrose in the fifth century maintained that his distinctive dress was a life of integrity and holiness.

It is hard to imagine how Clement of Alexandria could reconcile Mark 9:35 with his claim that the bishop was to occupy the first seat at table. By the time of the Council of Nicea (325) there

was a definite group of bishops. Yet history tells us there was close co-operation at all levels. **The greatest bishops in history were all pastors, for example Augustine, Ambrose, Basil and Gregory.**

By the end of the third century the bishop held full authority. Charismatic ministries and the office of bishop were not opposed. What happened was a gradual drawing into one person and one office the gifts of the many.

By the fourth century they were in contact with their brother bishops to form groupings known as the hierarchy (rule by priests). Organisation developed with local conferences, regional synods and world-wide meetings (ecumenical councils).

The saying, 'The Church is where the spirit is' changed to 'The Church is where the bishop is'.

In a letter written to the people of Ballarat by my former Bishop at Eastertide, 1990, he reflects on the role of the bishop in today's Church.

It is obviously impossible for the Bishop to be everywhere at once and to minister to every need of every person of the Diocese. Even if somehow that were possible, still it would not be appropriate. We are a Church, we are a family, we are a people of faith. Each of us has been called into this Body of Christ in Baptism and Confirmation because God loves us. Each one of us has a contribution to make to God's loving plan for the renewal of the world in Christ. So, even if somehow I were able personally to do all that needs to be done, it would not be appropriate for me to do it. Rather I see my role as authorising the ministry of others. That is, I seek to make it clear that the author of all ministry in the Church is Christ. Bishop Mulkearns, Ballarat 1990

4.1.2 Clergy

Originally the word 'clergy' meant one's lot in life, referring to the custom of casting a lot to see what job one would get. The notion passed from reference to the act of casting a lot to that of the one on whom the lot fell. He became 'the allotted one' or 'clergy'. It came into Church language to refer to the man whose lot it was to be bishop. In time the term 'clergy' began to refer to others surrounding the bishop - deacons, priests and eventually, by the third century, to all the holders of offices in the Church as opposed to the ordinary Christians or the 'laity'.

4.1.3 Priest

The role of priest was never applied to any Christian individual in the early days of the Church, even to the twelve apostles.

Jesus said we were to love in spirit and in truth (John 4:20) and that he would be present in their midst when two or three were gathered in his name (Matthew 18:20). Jesus was critical of cultic acts (Mark 12:28; John 2:14; 4:21) and says that the people are to be the Temple (1 Peter 2:4). Indeed, the Kingdom of God is within.

The title, priest, is not included in any of Paul's ministry lists. Jesus is referred to as priest in a very special sense in the letter to the Hebrews. Jesus was a layman, teacher or rabbi, not a priest. The gospel emphasis was not on Jesus as intermediary but rather on the building up of the Body of Christ. We are to be stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). We are all priestly (1 Peter 1:2). The spirit is radically democratic (Acts 2:17).

The role of priest as we know it is really the blending of a number of roles that emerged in the community - disciple, apostle, presbyter-bishop and presider at the Eucharist.

So, who did preside at the Eucharist? Prophets and teachers we are told (Acts 13:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:28). **It was community leadership it seems that entitled one to preside over the Eucharist.** Clement, Ignatius, Justin, Tertullian Hippolytus, Cyprian and the canonical tradition deriving from Hippolytus attest to this fact. There was a diversity of presiders in the early Church. Presidency was not tied to personal power or priestly characteristics. Priests were ordained to build and celebrate community and flowing from this to preside at Eucharist. In our day we tend to stress being sent rather than being called.

In the fourth century at the Council of Chalcedon it was decreed that no one was to be ordained without links to a specific community.

Innocent I in the early fifth century said it was possible to be ordained without a community if a bishop would provide support and sponsorship.

Delegation to a place changed to acquisition of power for the person. The nature of the personal power was clarified in the thirteenth century at the fourth Lateran Council when it was said that only a validly ordained priest was to celebrate the Eucharist.

The essential connection between community and ministry, expressed at the Council of Chalcedon in canonical form, shows that the difference between the power of ordination and the power of jurisdiction was not only unknown at that time, but even inconceivable in ecclesiological terms. Ministry is a concern of the local community. Cyprian demands this right as being of divine origin, i.e. as belonging to the nature of a 'community of God', even against Pope Stephen. 'No bishop is to be imposed on the people whom they do not want.' Leo the Great also puts the matter succinctly: 'He who must preside over all must be chosen by all.' At the same time this all implies that the ministry is a public matter and that therefore no one can appropriate the ministry of his own accord. The mutual relationship between community and ministry also points in this direction. The ministry is de fined essentially in ecclesial terms. E. Schillebeeckx, Ministry, New York. SCM Press, 198 1, p. 40 SCM Press Ltd, London

Original lay ministries became clericalised and made stepping stones to the priesthood. Ordination shifts in thinking and practice from a primary emphasis on community, needs, gifts, leadership and being place-specific to being abstracted and reduced to the ritual for transferring private power. The priest wherever he goes has the power to change bread and wine and forgive sins. He is marked by a special character that makes him intrinsically holy. He holds that holy power forever and wherever he goes. It is a reality with or without a community.

What do people want of their priests?

The majority, I believe, that there should be more interactions between priests and people. They place importance on the leadership style of their priest and look for someone who is open and affirming and willing to care for people under stress. They look for direction and visionary leadership but at the same time they want someone who has his feet on the ground. Priests, they hope, will be in touch with the large issues of Church and world. While there are many negative responses, almost without exception the respondents imply a belief in the essential nature of priesthood and a sincere appreciation of vital and committed pastors.

4.1.4 Deacon

Roles and structures emerged from the needs of the community. In the days when disciples were growing in number, the Twelve called a meeting of all the disciples and requested that seven deacons (Acts 6:1-3), men of good repute and full of the Spirit of Wisdom, be selected to assist with the serving in the community and free the Twelve to preach the Word. From other sources we know that women were not excluded from this ministry. Phoebe is named a minister, a deacon (*diakonos*) of the Church of Cenchreae (Romans 16.1).

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.' What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. Acts 6:1-7

From a collaborative and mutual ministry deacons came eventually to serve, not the community but indeed the bishop. Their importance, especially in regard to the financial control they exercised, aroused the jealousy of the elders and presbyters. The ministry of deacon in its own right (not just as a step on the way to priesthood) went into decline until it has seen a revival over recent decades.

4.2 Election to leadership in ministry

Election was always understood as the work of the Spirit. It was not what we understand by the democratic process of election today nor was the office handed down from on high. In fact at the very best of times it was a keen blend of the Spirit working through the people of God, and the leadership validating the choice.

The election tradition goes back to early days. The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus clearly says, 'let him be ordained as Bishop who has been chosen by all the people... by the consent of all let the Bishop lay his hands upon him.' The tradition was subject to political pressure and became open to abuse. The interesting aspect is that the community called its own bishop and it was sometimes with reluctance that men like Martin of Tours, Augustine, Ambrose and Gregory the Great were forced to accept the privilege and responsibility of the ministry. It was very much a ministry of the local Church community in communion with other local Church communities.

4.3 Testing the gifts

The Church has the right to set up quality controls for ministers and ministries and to insist that gifts be tested and authenticated at stages of development to match the changing demands on the ministries.

Without evaluation and accountability it is easy for the minister, ordained or non-ordained, to slip into individualism and idiosyncrasy. Lack of any measurement or feedback to the minister can erode confidence and lead to self-doubt. It is critical that each person in ministry be asked to give an account of his or her stewardship.

This area is problematic when it comes to the Church. So many gospel values do not make sense beside the standards of the world of human business. How does one test productivity? By what criteria do we decide that our ministry has been effective? How do we gauge success? How do we cope with an upside-down logic that says that if we want to live we have to die, if we want to be rich we must become poor and to grow to maturity requires our becoming like a small child?

A recommendation is given, in general terms, that gifts be tested by the local community (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22). No suggestion is given about the method of that testing.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5: 19-22

Not all ministers were found to be worthy or adequate. The letters to Timothy and Titus were written to counsel or admonish the erring leader. The situation today holds similar challenges. Questions are asked about appropriate structures of accountability in ministry. How can people be both supported and challenged in ministry?

Again, I quote from my former Bishop's thoughts:

It can be difficult for us to remember always that in ministry, while we surely are called to use our personal giftedness, we are not doing our own thing, but we are doing the Church's work; we are not building up ourselves but building up the Body of Christ. We can easily lose sight of how what we are doing is related to the larger picture of the mission of the Church. We can become isolated, somewhat narrow in our vision and perspectives and even rather proprietary and defensive. We are all part of the larger whole and that larger whole belongs to us all. We need to exercise our own role in such a way that others are encouraged rather than discouraged, to make their contribution to the Church. Bishop Mulkearns, Ballarat, Eastertide 1990

4.4 Handing on the faith

The minister is part of the living tradition of the Church and is missioned with a precious task - the handing on of the faith. The constant ripples of influence and tradition move ever onward and outward. The *sensus fidelium* of the people of God ensures that nothing that is of essence and of the Spirit is lost to the community. Thus is witness and living **Church connection received and passed on by the community.**

5. ALL ARE CALLED

5.1 Ministry Now

While no one definition satisfies, many people have tried to come to grips with the essence of ministry.

Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptised follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charisma and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness to, serve and realise the Kingdom of God. Thomas O'Meara, A Theology of Ministry Paulist, New York, 1983, p. 142

Nouwen says that ministry entails 'teaching, preaching, counselling, organising, and celebrating'. Or again, 'the on-going attempt to put one's search for God, with all the moments of pain and joy, despair and hope, at the disposal of those who want to join the search but do not know how'. (Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, Image, New York., 1978, p. 114).

Ministry serves the mission of the Church and refers to the service of the community that keeps the Gospel alive in different times and places.

Once all the ministries came to be attached to the clerical office the two terms became synonymous. In the Church today we are busy about returning ministries to the people and the whole community.

Ministry is not a choice but the privilege and responsibility of every Christian. Ministry is not just the response to an urge to do good. Ministry is at base the response to a divine call.

Again the call comes from the lips from prophets like Oscar Romero who gave his life for beliefs such as this:

*I repeat what I told you once before when we feared we might be left without a radio station: God's best microphone is Christ. And Christ's best microphone is the Church and **the church is all of you**. Let each of you, in your own vocation - nun, married person, bishop, priest, high-school or university student, workman labourer, market woman - each one in your own place live the faith intensely and feel that in your surroundings you are a true microphone of God our Lord. (27 January 1980 from *The Church is All of You*, Oscar Romero's sermons, speeches, letters and interviews compiled and translated by J. R. Brockman, Winston Press, 1984*

Today we believe that all Christians are called to ministry and called equally. A person does not share in someone else's ministry but rather as a result of Baptism each and every person is called. The fact that everyone is called to participate in the life and mission of the Church does not make particular ministries such as teaching or priesthood any less important. It will, however, influence the way these ministries and all ministries are exercised.

Now we know and believe this and yet there is still a huge gap between our beliefs and our practice, between our foreign policy and our home policy!

It is often difficult to reconcile those lofty challenges .

However, the context of ministry today is not decline and death but expansion and new life. The prime consideration has never been numbers and survival but openness to the spirit and the urgency of the Gospel message. It is critical that we do not settle for engaging in wars over words or in jostling for important seats in our church. What are at issue are grace, abundant love, compassion and deep human hunger.

Ministry in our Church is taking on an entirely new shape before our eyes.

For God has called a People not 'them and us'

'them and us' are unable to gather round, for at a round table there are no sides

ALL are invited to wholeness and to food... Roundtabling means no preferred seating, no first and last, no better, and no corners for 'the least of these'

Roundtabling means being with, a part of

It means form for the Spirit and gifts and disturbing profound peace for all

And it is we in the present that are mixing and kneading the dough for the future.

We can no longer prepare for the past.

Chuck Lathrop, 'In Search of a Round Table' from *A Gentle Presence, Ed* (Guian (ed.) ADOC Washington, DC 1977

6. FRAGILE STRUCTURES

6.1 At base

The basic difficulty is that we in “main-line” churches are trying to carry out these 'new' ministries that can be traced back to New Testament times within an institutional framework of Church that is essentially unreformed and where recognition, status and the transfer and use of power are often more important than they should be. It is all too easy to lose sight of the pastoral need that we expect and intend should drive the system. It is critical that we serve the increasing pastoral needs of our world and call our Anglican-Christian brothers and sisters to 'go into the vineyard too'.

A central question demands our attention.

- How will we take the 'power of the many' in the Church more seriously?
- What is being done to address this challenge of ministry?
- How do we arrive at true leadership formation?
- How do we model a true collaborative church focused on MISSION rather than maintenance?

Our goal in ministry should be to do alone only what we cannot do together. We have tended to work the other way around and do together only that which we cannot do alone.

6.2 Tension in Ministry

Tension exists for some people involved in ministry. Sometimes the tension is between the quantity and the quality of the service, between the immediate demand and the long-term plans, the urgent and the important.

There is so much to be done and so few to do the work. What I contribute is just a drop in the ocean. How can I be truly present to that one suffering person? Should I be? What about all the others whose needs we are not touching? Where are my services most needed - in direct service or in administration? These are some of the voices of tension.

A story illustrates the dilemmas of ministry.

A woman lived in a little village on the banks of a gently flowing river. The area was usually spoken of as 'downstream'. This woman was careful and attentive to those around her and also kept a keen eye on the environment. She was highly regarded in the village. Townsfolk and strangers had discovered over the years that she was a woman of great compassion. If anyone was in trouble you could count on this woman to respond with practical compassion. No one was ever turned away. This did not leave her with much time on her hands. So much to do, so little time to do it! 'One of these days I must take a walk upstream,' she often said.

Then one day she saw a baby floating down the river. She rescued the baby, clothed it and cared for it. Next day two babies were found floating downstream. The village people dived into the river and rescued them. This went on for days. The woman gathered all the resources she could find and called on her friends to help. Soon they built an orphanage. Every supportive service they could supply was set up. No expense of time or money was spared. Then a stranger to the town asked a simple question - don't you think we should go upstream and see who is throwing these babies into the river and find out why? The suggestion seemed so logical. The townsfolk were stopped in their tracks. What is more important - upstream or downstream ministry? Is it, an either/or a both/and, choice? Decisions. Dilemmas. Tensions.

6.3 Opportunities for Ministry

While cultural contexts change and change rapidly, basic human needs are timeless and universal. People want to be ministered to in their joys and their sorrows at times of birth, death, transition, illness and decision-making.

Human faces call us to ministry - no matter what the place, no matter what the time. They are people... People who are bereaved

People convalescing at home or in hospital

People in nursing homes and hostels

People who live alone

People in trouble with the law and their families
 People in the process of divorce or marriage breakdown
 People who are lonely People who are newcomers to the area
 People who are visiting from the country, interstate or overseas
 People who are inactive in the Church
 People with handicapped members of their family or household
 People who are terminally ill
 People who have difficult decisions to make
 People who are unemployed
 People who have been retrenched
 People who are struggling with their faith
 People who have sole responsibility for a household/ family
 People experiencing the birth of a child
 People who have suffered a financial or career setback
 People in the process of moving to another place
 People recently retired
 People who are depressed and have lost their hope in life
 People who are financially rich and spiritually poor
 Others... ..

6.3.1 Just a brief word concerning Ministry and culture

While there is much that is universal and timeless about our call to ministry, we need at the same time to pay careful attention to the cultural context in which that ministry is exercised.

What matters is to evangelise the culture, ... vital ... deep ... to the roots... Always taking the person as starting point Always - relationships of people among themselves And with God.

The Kingdom that the Gospel proclaims is lived by people who are profoundly linked to a culture.
 Evangelii Nuntiandi #20, *On Evangelisation in the Modern World*, Paul VI, 1975

6.4 Challenges in Ministry

That ministry is the work of each and every baptised Christian is now clearly recognised globally at least in theory if not always in practice.

No longer does the Church mean the ordained and no longer is ministry viewed as the exclusive preserve of the ordained group in the Church. **Yet, when it comes to ministry we can identify lots of gaps and divisions.** There is a gap between 'our foreign policy and our domestic policy' - what we say abroad and do at home; between our theory and our practice; teaching and example; clergy and laity; men and women; official language and our local conversations.

6.4.1 Addressing the divisions

6.4.1.1 Clergy-Laity

Some would see the clergy/laity division as the fundamental difficulty to be addressed in our Church community.

Whatever the root or origin of the word 'laity', today it means ordinary, lacking knowledge, passive, not consecrated, not ordained, set over against the clergy and inferior to them.

The current meaning of the term '**laity**' effectively excludes the baptised from publicly representing the community. To see our ministry as happening in a clerical Church and a lay world is ultimately unhelpful for all of us. In the Hebrew Scriptures, of course, *laos* refers to the whole People of God. Now it is often used to mean those who are not priest. The problem here is that most of the Church is implicitly defined over against the role and function of the ordained ministry. There is a further problem today: the word 'lay' is widely used of those who are inexpert in any field. So we might say "I have a lay person's understanding of medical matters." There is real **PROBLEM of LANGUAGE** here. The 'only-a-lay-person's' mentality comes back to haunt the Church. One answer to this problem, I believe, is to first define ourselves as community of disciples, and then articulate the role of ordained ministry from within THIS context. Perhaps the articulation of this role is to see:

1. The ordained minister as developing Christian community precisely by calling and enabling others to an active role within the community. Such leadership is exercised in the manner of the servant, one whose life is given over to care for the community.
2. The ordained minister's function is connected with discipleship: s/he is publicly deputed to lead the community along the path of a disciple, seeking every opportunity to open out of the community the possibility of deeper personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth, constantly attempting to enable others to name the call of the Gospel in the very specific circumstances of their own lives.

All of this means that the ordained minister's identity is finally found in his/her own following of Jesus. Only on a life that is centred on prayer can one find their role in parish leadership. Only in his or her own struggle to be a faithful disciple can he or she find the experience that can lead others to place Jesus at the centre of their lives. I believe the priest's identity is only discovered as a person of spirituality and prayer. **The ordained minister has a unique role: called from within and by the community to care for community life and to invite this community constantly into discipleship. The ordained minister is someone who cares passionately about discipleship, and about the community of disciples.**

Therefore, some searching questions are appropriate. In our present practice of lay ministry are we perpetuating an institutional and clerical model that does not work? Are we maintaining the divisions between leaders and the community? Have we substituted the pastoral assistant/lay reader for the assistant priest?

Awareness of the issue of the clergy/laity division is alive in many parts of the Australian Church. Some dioceses are taking active steps at overcoming the divisions by fostering dialogue, articulating a vision for collaborative (co-labouring) ministry and developing structures that can bring about this new reality. This process goes far beyond what we seem to do on the floor of our Synods!

(A word with regard to Synod, which by its very nature, a parliamentary advocacy approach to decision making sets us a win-lose posture, as I see it. It guarantees the power struggles that cause us so much anxiety and frustration.

I am convinced, even after three Synods that this secular model is, in fact, not fully congruent with church, with Gospel values, with the teachings of Jesus and the experience of the early Church as indicated in Acts 15. The parliamentary model tends to be analytical; selective; competitive and controlling. A model based on the 'shared wisdom' of the community as indicated in Acts 15 tends to be more synthesising, holistic, collaborative and enabling.

CENTRAL *to the demand for change in the way the Church pursues its mission is the need to shift from the old paradigm of the priest at the centre of all things, with the people gathered around as a dependent congregation who come to be fed and supported.*

Like all relationships of dependency we have great difficulty breaking free of them, because it is always a comforting thing to have someone like the priest upon whom we can depend and place blame.

We must shift from such a relational structure of priestly dependence to that of a "ministering community" where all the members of the congregation recognise that each has a gift of ministry to share in the building up of the body and in proclaiming the Good News in the world.

The idea that every member of the Church has a vocation and a ministry is as old as the New Testament itself, but it is an insight that has been overlooked for hundreds of years.

This is in no way to diminish the importance of the priestly office, but to place it in the interdependent and interactive framework of the participating congregation.

It is intriguing to note that a key concern in today's Church is to find the proper role of the laity. It was quite the opposite in the questing of the early Church. Everyone belonged and had a ministry but what they asked as communities expanded and new ones were formed was 'do we need offices and roles?' Do we need full-time ministers?

7. LEADING US INTO THE FUTURE

7.1 The prophetic task of the minister

Walter Brueggemann speaks of the role of the prophet in the community as two-fold. **The task is to criticise and to energise.** It means asking questions like 'What is here in this world in which I live and move that should not be?', and as well, 'What is not here in this world in which I live and move that might be?' It means being good at reading the signs of the times, both the danger signals and the traces of promise for new life. More specifically, the pastoral, minister in a community has the job of 'helping the community to move back down

1. from the buoyant summons to the concrete reason
2. from the settled world to the shattering experience
3. from the system to the story.'

(Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1988, p. 124).

7.2 Formation for the prophetic minister

Ministry in our world today calls for men and women who do not shy away from careful preparation, solid formation and training but at the same time are free enough to break through the restrictive boundaries of disciplines and specialities in the conviction that the Spirit moves beyond professional expertise.

They need to be able to reflect on the movement of God in their life and to articulate their personal God-story to others.

When someone applies for a position it is our custom to assess the person's strengths. This makes good sense. So, too, in ministry we require people who possess gifts of teaching, preaching, planning, counselling or celebrating. Yet, we know that to be an effective minister requires more than intelligence, competence and efficiency. It means, at base, coming to grips with the mystery of life and death. It means coming to appreciate not simply one's gifts but also one's limits.

Walter Brueggemann told a group of ministers that the chief goal of ministerial formation should be to teach people how to blush. This means developing a sensitivity and alertness to one's own involvement in maintaining structures of injustice. It is healthy, at times, to blush with shame. But let that blush energise rather than paralyse. It is just as good, healthy and necessary, at times, to blush with pride and happiness.

On my Ordination retreat I was asked by the director to reflect on the question not, 'Are you strong and talented enough to be a priest but rather are you weak enough?'

Is this person weak enough to be a priest? *Is this person deficient enough so that s/he can't ward off significant suffering from his/her life, so that s/he lives with a certain amount of failure, so that s/he feels what it is like to be an average man or woman? Because it is in this deficiency, in this interior lack, in this weakness, maintains Hebrews that the efficacy of the ministry and priesthood of Christ lies. Weakness links us profoundly with people. It allows us to feel the human condition, the struggle, the darkness, and the anguish that calls out for salvation. Further, weakness relates us profoundly and apostolically with God, because it provides the arena in which God's power is made manifest in weakness.*

I believe this same question is at the heart of all ministry, ordained or otherwise.

'So if a person wants to be a minister, let her be happy to make her weakness her special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over her... for when I am weak then I am strong.'

(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

If we genuinely believe this there are significant implications for the whole Church community and for the structures we develop for ministry.

7.3 Formation in the tradition

Sallie McFague says of the need for formation in one's tradition,

A person must get inside a religious tradition, be able to move around in it both comfortably and critically, love it and question it at the same time... This is what formation is about - the

settling of a religious tradition into the very flesh and bones of one's existence. Quoted in W. McElvancy, The People of God in Ministry, Abingdon, Nashville, 198 1, p. 49

Whatever form ministry takes, the basis is always the same: to lay down one's life for one's friends. But why does a person lay down his life for his friends? There is only one answer to that question: to give life. All the functions of the ministry are life giving. Whether a person teaches, counsels, preaches, plans, or celebrates, her aim is to open new perspectives, to offer new insight, to give new strength, to break through the chains of death and destruction, and to create new life which can be affirmed.

For years I have intuitively defined the call to ministry as really a call to depth spirituality. I find myself using the phrase 'being and building the community of disciples.' It is now clearer to me than ever before that "to be church" is, in fact, to strive to be holy!

8. IN A WORD, MINISTRY IS...

- Ministries, **distinct but not separate**
- Concerned primarily with the Good News of Jesus Christ
- An essential function of the Church
- To other people but also by, with and for them
- Concerned with the development of relationships where people minister to one another. Sometimes ministry reverses our understanding of who is the minister and who is ministered to
- Based on the call of God heard through Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Liturgy and Life, all of these in **relationship** one to another
- Fostered by communities who are open to moments of silence and solitude, suffering and disintegration, wholeness and celebration, weakness and strength, corporate praise and worship .
- Concerned with justice and compassion
- Learned from the textbooks of life especially from the marginalised, the poor, the alienated and outcast of our society.
- Addressed to and by people of all ages and stages of faith
- Alive in a community where people ask questions such as - whose voice is not being heard? Who is shut out? Who stays away?
- Welcoming, wondering, discovering, reflecting, respecting, listening, showing compassion, sharing our inner life
- Teaching, preaching, counselling, organising, celebrating, witnessing, criticising, energising, affirming
- Leadership that is collaborative, mutual, co-responsible, shared
- Authorised by the baptismal call of each person A gift of the Spirit
- Universal and particular
- World-centred, place specific
- An activity
- For the Kingdom ... the Kingdom is the source, context and goal of ministry
- Transformative, liberating, healing.

Ministry is...

- Human faces
- Fragile sensitive structures.

The new is already on the horizon. The future is our charge, but not ours alone.

We are, together, carriers of a new vision for the Church, the World and the Kingdom. The vision of the new is growing slowly, joyfully, painfully among us. Understanding ministry will involve seeing new visions and dreaming new dreams...

'I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your young people shall see visions, your old people dream dreams.' (Acts 2:17; Joel 3: 1).