

**REVD. LORAIN N MELLOR: FEB 2021****Sabbatical musings:**

When I was designated as President I realised very quickly that I did not want to return to the district after my year away and then take my sabbatical and so I put it back from 2018/19 to 2019/20. Having planned it all out and made arrangements it all seemed rather simple: I planned to go back to Fiji to do some change management and leadership training with the staff of Cliff College. To return to Perkins Methodist Theological University in America to do further work around enabling ministry interns to come and work in our Connexion and also spending time with the faculty there. Lastly to hopefully spend some time visiting France to spend time with my sister who lives there and of course all these plans soon came to a grinding halt with the advent of the Corona Virus.

So what to do: in the end it came down to not being able to put it off any longer, so I re-evaluated my plans and they now looked like setting myself three main tasks: Trying to ride 500miles on my bike from the 23rd of March 2020 to the 22nd of March 2021 in what we now often refer to as the 'lockdown year'. Now that might not sound very far to you but I had not been on my bike for a number of years and was very unfit. Secondly to read books relating to Leadership and Change and to spend time with a colleague reflecting on said topics and thirdly to find an online course to complete.

On reflecting with others about how best to arrange my sabbatical the fact that I already had things in my diary that could not be moved, for example stationing, it was decided to take it in two parts but in reality it turned out to be three parts.

I took an extended holiday break in August and then 3 weeks in December [2020] and finally from the end of January [2021], when I have been able to take 6 weeks. I did very little in the first part in August as my son was admitted to hospital with a life-threatening illness, thankfully now recovered and back at work. The whole of my sabbatical has been interspersed with issues that I am involved in at Cliff College as part of my role there, Connexional matters and occasionally in the district but I have been very comfortable with these interventions.

**BIKE RIDE:** I was very blessed to receive at Christmas an exercise bike from my family and so during the snowy weather we experienced in January and early February I was still able to keep up my bike riding and have now passed my target which I am very pleased about. I am not sure how much fitter I am as I ride very slowly but I am improving. But to date I can report I have not yet fallen off!

**REFLECTIONS WITH A COLLEAGUE :**

Our reflections have been held on a more or less weekly basis in December and during this third part of the sabbatical and we have been reading the same books and also responded to a number of Connexional reports that will be coming to conference over the next two years.

We have reflected on a number of issues around subjects such as leadership and how good leaders need to build effective teams, change management, and adaptive leadership. Our reading and reflecting directed us to many reports around the fact that modern leadership is co-creative and works with multiple stakeholders in multidisciplinary ways, therefore leaders need to build trust, offer hope and bring a compelling vision of the future that others will follow. We both agree that leadership needs to be empathic, authentic and transparent. Leaders need to face the stark reality of the context and challenges we face as a Church and therefore needs to be agile, innovative and be able to flex and pivot. In addition we will not succeed unless organisational culture changes to line up with mission priorities. Leaders need to know the endpoint and what it is they are trying to achieve.

We spent some time on conflict. Some ministers are dealing with this on an almost daily basis, which is inevitable when leaders lead, and we believe that this is something not to be feared but seen as an opportunity. We knew this already but perhaps needed to remind ourselves. We have spent time looking at different forms of behaviour in leaders and struggled with some of our detailed and in-depth reading about narcissistic leadership. This led to conversations around how we need to protect the church, also that we know that such leaders have an exaggerated impact on followers and behaviours in institutions and for us especially within the church. Controlling leaders do not like representative forums, even if such forums are often essential for the balance, accountability and the democratic functioning of the church. People who have this type of personality often find themselves in churches and circuits in 'power positions' which can influence in a myriad of ways. This is why it's so important for us as individuals, churches, circuits and districts to have a regular thorough theological

and organisational reflection on leadership. Methodism has always been uneasy discussing “leadership”, perhaps rightly fearing for its identity as a lay led “flat” organisation, not dependent on strong individuals to flourish. However, this unease and lack of thinking/ reflection has left us vulnerable to narcissists and others who seek leadership as status. Such people, counterintuitively, will avoid any discussion of the nature of leadership as they imagine it threatens their status/ position in the organisation. We talk about the priesthood of all believers but many are unsure of its theological and biblical underpinning and why we often misunderstand what it actually means. Many don't get past priesthood and forget the “all”. I wonder can we be honest, transparent and rigorous in seeking to nurture leadership that the Methodist church needs, while giving proper ‘honour’ to every member of the body (1 Corinthians 12.12–31)

It is no surprise, we all know the church needs to change. To adapt to where we are culturally and as a result of the world pandemic and in this context we sometimes confuse transformational with “people who do things / achieve things”. There is evidence that narcissists are beginning to corral transformational leadership language for their own ends. True transformational leadership always involves others at a deep level in decision making and draws out / develops the gifts of others - it is not just about the leader. Poor leadership threatens the whole of the church. It does not “save” it by “strong” leadership as narcissists claim. Narcissistic leadership is described in the literature we have read as essentially “opportunist” - its characteristics are: short time horizon; focus on concrete things; manipulative; deceptive; rejects feedback; externalises blame; distrustful; fragile self-control; hostile humour; views luck as central; flouts power, sexuality; engages in stereotypes; views rules as loss of freedom; punishes according to 'eye for an eye' ethic; treats what can get away with as legal; I have seen some of these characteristics while in ministry and interestingly not surprised that many academics say that opportunistic narcissists thrive in a ‘spiritual’ organisation.

Arbuckle, writing of the role of dissent in Roman Catholic leadership, makes a sharp distinction between what he calls “the politics of salvation” (which are primarily about strong people who rescue and conserve) and the “politics of revelation” (seeing what will emerge, transforming the landscape together). I believe that a key aspect of learning for us post Covid is understanding what it is to lead in liminal situations (Susan Beaumont). The sort of qualities that are “waiting to

see what emerges / allowing things to emerge” We urgently need leadership that can work comfortably, and in a godly way, with uncertainty and newness – and a church that can too.

In a Church of England press release, Professor David Voas, one of the leaders of the research, [Church Growth Research Programme] said that ‘Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment’. In the same press release, ‘leadership’ tops the list of ‘common ingredients strongly associated with growth’, a list that also includes ‘clear mission and purpose’, ‘being intentional’ and ‘vision’.

If, indeed, we do want to see the church grow disciples, it is very important that leadership is assessed, and regularly mentored by independent people. Confirming their personal commitments to, and inhabiting of, the culture and values of the church, circuit and district. And how are the leaders embodying the values of the mission plans? - see Laloux, *Reinventing Organisations*. Supervision and MDR should both reflect our personal values and that of our Mission Plans so that one can discern cohesion. Not to have all three in place makes for a disjointed approach to mission and ministry. The culture of supervision is enormously helpful, but, I believe, we need to make it more robust and challenging. There is compelling evidence that for an organisation to grow into a new phase of its life, its leaders must themselves inhabit a new way of thinking and behaving which is more collaborative, naturally involving of others, less hierarchical and bureaucratic (also Laloux)

Within Methodism we can achieve much of this by making decisions in line with the conference report on trusteeship. Look to work across traditional boundaries, stop reinventing the wheel in circuits and districts and share in leadership, resources, mission and ministry. To seek to shape our understanding of leadership by means of a reasoned engagement with Scripture, in conversation with the ongoing Christian tradition. Our questions about leadership need to be asked in relation to the ministry and mission of the church, the ministry and mission given to it by God. We cannot hold a meaningful conversation about ‘leadership’ in isolation from the urgent and necessary conversations taking place within the church post Covid about the mission and ministry of the whole people of God. A Christian leader is, after all, a disciple first and a leader second, and that means that he or she is and remains a follower even while being a leader.

I will be speaking at presbyteral synod about the calling to presbyteral ministry and the sort of leadership that Jesus cultivated and as disciples what we are called to as for me the New Testament is clear and counter cultural in its depiction of leadership as servant hood and other-person centred, as vulnerable and in the service of the weakest and involves others in leadership. It is also very clear how Jesus embodied leadership.

For leaders to be effective in what is now a much smaller Methodist church we need to be adaptive leaders. 'Adaptive leadership' is a leadership model that was introduced by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky. Heifetz defines it as the act of mobilising a group of individuals to handle tough challenges and emerge triumphant in the end. There are four main tenants of Adaptive Leadership.

**Emotional intelligence** is the ability to recognise your own feelings and those of other people. With this awareness, an adaptive leader is able to build trust with other participants and foster quality relationships.

**Organisational justice** Another fundamental principle of adaptive leadership is fostering a culture of honesty. Adaptive leaders know the best policies to introduce for the good of the organisation. They also know the best ways to introduce these changes so that people embrace them. Adaptive leaders are willing to accommodate other peoples' views, hence, assuring them that they are valued and respected.

**Development** Adaptive leadership entails learning new things. If one technique is not yielding desired results, an adaptive leader goes out of his or her way to discover new strategies that can work. With new techniques, the ministers/ employees/lay leaders and the membership will experience growth and development.

**Character** Adaptive leadership is about having a deep sense of character, being transparent and creative. Adaptive leaders may not always be right but they earn the respect of those they work with and practice what they recommend.

Adaptive Leaders {AL} have the ability to link organisational change to the primary values, abilities, and dreams of those involved, in our context the church membership. AL have the capacity to create an environment that embraces diversity of views and takes advantage of such collective knowledge to benefit the church and understands that change can be a painful process. Therefore, he or she can foresee and counteract any reluctant behaviour from colleagues and the CLT. AL have an understanding that large-scale change is a gradual process, which calls for persistence and a willingness to bear the pressure that comes along with that and they are proactive, looking for opportunities

and investing the necessary resources to go after them. AL are people who admit when they make mistakes and are able to change or abandon things that are not working within the life of the church and therefore they must be open to experimentation and risk-taking and encouraging innovation among circuit lay staff, the CLT, church stewards and employees. In *The Fearless Organisation* Edmundson asks the question why highly trained medical teams make mistakes and she found in her research that the best teams make the most mistakes because they admit to them, low enabling teams don't.

In summary, adaptive leadership can be summed up by building teams that have distributed leadership, where there is an optimal talent mix, [which indicates implications for superintendency, stationing, ongoing ministerial development,] and have a transparent character and is good at developing mutual trust. Its therefore also imperative that teams, CLTs for example are trained together. AL have clear values and mission plans and therefore the team, the CLT .....have well defined goals, duties, values and ground rules, which fosters a strong bond of trust and cohesion. We have much to learn as a church and as individuals as we move into a post Covid world as within the church we have been very competency based when we should have been moving more in the arena of values.

### ***ONLINE COURSE:***

I am in the process of completing three. One around cake making/ decorating as I have wedding cake to make for my nephew who is getting married this summer. A creative bible reading course with Cliff College lead by Mike Parsons which is proving invaluable. My third course is Digital Church Planting with the Evangelism and Growth team which I have just started.

This paper has not been written to provide any proposals, or answers or ways forward or a vision for the future, but to offer in relation to my sabbatical a resume of my time away and as directed by our standing orders and our covenant to write a short article to go on the district website. This I believe goes some way to making best use of our time, yet does not go as far some districts in requesting that sabbatical reflections/learning is shared with the presbyteral synod/ or ministers development group.

This sabbatical gift from the church I am truly grateful for as I am to Tamsin my PA, to Andrew and Kate, the deputy chairs, and Rosie, our

facilities manager, who have been exemplary in keeping everything on track during a very challenging time as I knew with absolute certainty they could do even though they themselves doubted. I am grateful too during this time of sabbatical and lockdown to spend time with my family and friends on Zoom and our Whatsapp group which I don't often have time to respond to and this has been a real delight. I am more than grateful to God through the Holy Spirit for the nudging to do more reading around the subject and the time in which to reflect in prayer and being able to respond to Gods leading, direction, purpose and promptings.

LNM Feb 2021

## BOOKS LIST

### READ TO DATE

Reinventing Organisations; An Illustrated invitation Fredric Laloux

Dare to Lead Brene Brown

Leading Change John P Kotter

The Practice of Adaptive Leadership Ron Heifetz

How To Lead When You Don't Know Where You Are Going Susan Beaumont [*re read. reading with the superintendents*]

The Undefended Leader Simon Walker [*re read*]

Canoeing The Mountains, Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory. Tom Bolsinger [*re read*]

Leading From The Second Chair Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson

Faith Compassion and the Challenge of Business Keith Garner

Rewilding the Church Steve Aisthorpe [*re read reading with the district team*]

Mapping Church Missions. Hoover.

The Fearless Organisation. Creating Psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation and growth. Amy C.Edmundson

2020 Conference Report on the Ministerial Covenant

Narcissistic Behaviours in Leaders [ Various articles]

### HOPE TO COMPLETE IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS

HBR 10 must reads [ Harvard Business review] On Leadership vol 1 and 2

Non Profit Leadership in a For Profit World editors David Gyerston and Jospeh Krivickas

Consiglieri. Leading From The Shadows Richard Hytner

Fragments of Fractured Times Nicola Slee  
Priesthood Stephen Cotterill