

SYNOD SERMON - DIOCESE OF TASMANIA 2005

LEADERSHIP

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The Bishop has asked me to preach on leadership at this service for the opening of our Synod. We are the leaders of the Missionary Diocese of Tasmania. We are the ones who have the responsibility under God to make decisions, commit resources and set directions. I think this invitation from the Bishop is an honour – but it might also be a form of punishment, as I am more comfortable debating **in Synod** than preaching to **it!**

The reflections I share this evening arise from the study that I am engaged with about leadership of non-profit organizations; especially those that are faith-based. From my study there are three key words that reoccur time and again when we look at **transformational leadership**. That is, leadership that will assist the Church transform itself into what God has in store for it. These three key words are: Servanthood, Stewardship and Fidelity.

Servanthood – In the Gospel according to St Luke (22:27) we find a clear description of the pattern of Jesus' leadership: "But I am among you as one who serves." The leadership of Jesus sought to transform the usual hierarchical images of authority and even turned upside down the primary modes of leadership in the society.

Servant hood is not mentioned in any of the normal business administration books that I have on my shelf. A commitment to serve is the prerequisite for being in leadership in any Christian organization. Without this essential motivation, leadership can easily become self-serving, turned in on itself and its own needs. This style of leadership, as service, is a form of commitment to a vision that calls an organization into being and nurtures and guides its life. As leaders in this Diocese we are to be committed not to our own ideals or dreams but to the Vision that we have been given in '*ahealthychurch . . . transforminglife*'. We are to be of service.

Stewardship - As stewards, leaders are called to remember that the organizations which they serve do not ultimately belong to them. Organizations standing within theological and church traditions cannot define themselves simply on their own terms. If such organizations lose sight of their essential vocation as communities ultimately accountable to the Gospel, then they have lost their reason for existence. It is the task of leaders to remember this calling and to care for the life of the organization in light of this commitment. In particular, leaders hold in trust the vision of the organization and the contemporary nature of that calling.

As synod members we need to recall that the Diocese does have a history, but it is not defined by a constitution, ordinances, motions and reports. It is more than that, much more, as God calls us into fellowship with each other, taking into that fellowship the responsibility, or stewardship, for all that we have been, all that we are and all that we will be.

The steward is a primary image for leadership in the Christian community. Essential to understanding the office of steward is the recognition that it originates in something beyond itself. At the center of stewardship is the management of resources belonging to God. Paul (1 Cor 4:1) writes to the Corinthians: “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.” He continues by saying that the hallmark of stewards is “that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor. 4:2). This means that there are multiple criteria for the practice of stewardship. Leaders who are stewards will not want the (Financial) Estimates to be in deficit but at the same time will want us to be guided by what God would have us to do in responding to those in need. Stewards will not want us to fail those with whom we minister who are vulnerable or at risk but at the same time will want us to get the right processes in place and invest in protecting people.

The third word is **fidelity** and it is found in the management textbooks when they talk about solvency: having money to pay the bills. The fiduciary responsibility of leaders is not just to keep an organization solvent; it is most of all to keep the organization faithful to the aims and purposes that were God inspired at its foundation. Faithful leaders will prayerfully approach the decisions that confront them

As opposed to the three words that I have used to date there are often three other approaches to leadership that are at work. That is, three approaches that **fail to be transformative**, indeed they tend to hold us back from leading as we ought.

For too long leadership has been viewed as the work of **custodians** whose primary task is the maintenance of the organization as it is or has been. We have often gone forwards by looking through a rearview mirror. We have heard it often enough on the synod floor, or at a Parish Council meetings.

Conversely, we just as often have seen leadership as the work of **referees** who sort out conflicts and step in when harmony falls too far out of balance. Leaders have often presided as a court of last resort without acknowledging or accepting responsibility for the overall well-being of the organization. This is a failure to actually give direction and move things forward, to take risks, to creatively respond to conflict and to be an agent for change.

The third non-transformational leadership style is that of a **lobbyist**. The leader is someone who represents a constituency or interest group. In this sense, the Synod is understood as a kind of parliament or a general assembly in which particular claims on the organization are made. What often happens in this arrangement is that some demands are met but everyone loses sight of the whole in the process. The organization is lost in its particularities and no connections are made so that its center or core may be understood, supported and advocated. The loud voice wins out despite what the vision might say.

When leaders view themselves as custodians, referees, or lobbyists, they give up the most important task of leadership; which is responsibility for the vision

of there organization. Though leaders cannot arbitrarily make decisions about that vision, they are fundamentally responsible for seeing that the vision is articulated and that it informs all operations of the organization. The vision should shape the organizations mission and its programs. Ultimately, leaders are the only group in an organization who has primary responsibility for seeing that the vision does not get lost in the details of daily life.

Can you see the difference? Transformation leaders are not custodians, referees or lobbyists; instead, they are faithful stewards who seek to serve.

As we come to the next few days at Synod can we commit ourselves to lead **transformationally**. That is, **can we commit ourselves to:**

- + putting aside the idea of holding on to the past and ignoring where the Spirit is leading;
- + being prepared to take risks, state a position and provide direction; and
- + looking at the big picture not just what effects our own patch?

Can we commit ourselves to:

- + being of service to one another;
- + acting as stewards, acknowledging that all we have is God's and the gifts we have are to be used for God's purposes; and
- + remaining faithful to the call we have received to discipleship in Christ?

Canon Chris Jones, Synod, Launceston, 19 May 2005