

## **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES ON MINISTRY – A REFLECTION:**

### **The Biblical Foundation:**

Ephesians 4: 11 – 13 assert that through Jesus Christ, God gave gifts to those called as leaders within the Church (the body of Christ). While these gifts varied in content and capacity i.e. apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers, the objective towards which they were to be exercised was singular... *“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.”* In other words, leaders within the Church were expected to be *enablers*, facilitating every member and by extension the entire body, towards spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness.

There is an assumption in the text, that as facilitators and enablers, church leaders would acquaint themselves and become conversant, with the complexities of human nature, the dynamism of the cultures within which they operate and the challenge[s] to cogent transmission of the unchanging Gospel in an ever changing world. Consequent on the preceding, one can conclude that church leaders and by extension the entire “Laos” or body of believers, were expected, in the exercise of ministry, to be “pro” rather than “re” active. One rather pointed challenge to this pro-active characteristic is ability to maintain theological soundness even as change is embraced. To this end, there is a sense in which generative reflection/action ought to be the rule rather than the exception.

## **The Socio/Cultural Context:**

In what ways does the preceding inform and challenge the church of today? Statistics, from Jamaica and elsewhere in the world, have highlighted a marked decline in membership within *main line* churches over the last three decades; there remains, however, a sense in which belief in an Ultimate Being, evidenced in increased reference to spirituality in everyday talk, is arguably on the increase. If this is so, the Church (particularly those within the category designated *Main Line or Traditional*) must take cognisance of the fact that consistent application of time-bound methodologies in transmitting the Gospel message to increasingly *post-modern* generations, is tantamount to a denial of the need for currency, in carrying out the mandate, outlined in *The Great Commission* [Matt.28: 18 – 20]. For the exercise of ministry to be both credible and cogent, given the challenge of evolving socio/cultural realities buttressed by healthy dose scepticism, pro-active preparedness, evidenced in innovations in ministerial formation and methods of discipleship, cannot be optional.

The world has moved far and away from the Pauline era of circulating letters as an effective or even realistic means of communicating the Gospel and dealing with the moral and social ills affecting church and society. Effective ministerial leadership today, requires and hence is dependent upon conversance with cutting edge trends in *leadership, communication and discipleship*. While in the past a primary objective of theological education and ministerial formation might have been preparation for Holy Orders, the challenge today, of being effective *equippers of the saints*, demands that learning be a lifelong commitment to a process of spiritual, moral and social engagement, for every leader within the church whether or not they function in an ordained capacity.

### **The Vocation to Ministry: Challenge and Opportunity:**

The Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, falling within the *Mainline/Traditional* category referred to earlier, exists within a local and global climate of increasing moral, social and economic uncertainty and decline. The situation has been further compounded by the fact of evolving trends in ministerial formation and practice that have made redundant, certain age-old methods. A new or arguably modified ministry hermeneutic, therefore, which takes into account that exercised by ordained and non-ordained ministers, operating in the stated context, is an imperative that requires intentional, wholehearted and committed engagement.

For the Diocese to make any significant strides in fulfilling its *mission*, equipping its leaders, to become competent enablers and facilitators will, of necessity, begin with creation of a ***Policy on Ministry*** that, informed by its *vision*, outlines clearly and succinctly, the Biblical and theological foundations and principles that will inform and influence ministerial formation processes and hence the ultimate practice of ministry for ordained and non-ordained leaders. Such a policy will identify the necessary requirements for ensuring that regardless of the era, ministry will be exercised towards propagation of the Gospel, in ways that facilitate *all peoples, coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and thereby, embracing their true identity.*

In the second chapter of *Serving with Power (1999)*, Kortright Davis addresses the issue of fluidity of praxis in relationship with theological rootedness in what he refers to as a “**lively faith in God**” that is marked by constant discovery and can only be engaged via radical engagement of the actual, historical and concrete contexts of life. The kind of ministry that is required in our diocese currently and will, with variations still be worthy of its calling in the future, is one in which knowledge and understanding of the prevailing cultures within which it operates, is

balanced by courageous action. It is the kind of ministry then that ought to be *prophetic* in its praxis by viewing the world and the various entities that inform its evolving, through divine lenses. Such ministry, the preparation for and exercise of which remains a formidable but achievable challenge, is marked by a characteristic, implied by Walter Brueggemann *The Prophetic Imagination* (2001) as the ability to unmask and challenge real or imagined fears in order to reveal new futures that can be believed in and embraced. It is the kind of ministry that is congruent with Davis' *lively faith* metaphor, implied in the diocesan vision of "*joyful and energetic discipleship*"

### **Ethical [Transformational] Leadership Defined:**

Walter Earl Fluker, in his book *Ethical Leadership* (p. 57) asserts that among the many challenges of the twenty-first century, one primary challenge of leadership is the ability to 'stay awake.' There is a sense in which, ability to exercise exemplary and credible ministry in the fast paced world of the twenty-first century with its persistent clamor for personal success, begins with recognition of the deeply spiritual nature of the self in relationship with the Creator and ground of all being. From that perspective and in light of the prevailing context, effective ministerial leadership that transcends boundaries of socio/cultural, even traditional practices and expectations in a transfigured sense, must be morally and ethically grounded.

Because ministry is never exercised in a vacuum, while the required moral and ethical moorings of the self is acknowledged and embraced, it remains an undeniable fact that the real test of transfigured ministerial leadership is in the valley of decisions (where contending, even conflicting entities abound) even more so than on the mountain of revelation. In other words, *staying awake* as a minister, assumes conversance with the many and varied issues that impact

Christian life and ministry; it is being aware that while the position of the minister does not inoculate against the challenges of the age, it provides extra-ordinary opportunities for engaging the social, cultural and economic constructs that continue to shape life. The “*awake*” leader will, therefore, exercise ministry that is marked by *humble assertiveness, authoritative congeniality and disciplined discipleship*, characteristics that require high and disciplined levels of ethics, effectiveness and commitment to wholesome transformation.

Perhaps it is this objective of staying awake, as a consequence of the complexities of changing (arguably deteriorating) value systems and resulting ambiguities within the *global village*, that gave rise to another of Fluker’s metaphor, that of the “*intersection*” which conveys the image of a place where varying and competing worlds converge and, to a certain extent, collide. The “*intersection*” remains a place where life altering decisions with far reaching effects are made; where change and transformation take place and, depending on the quality of the leadership, where positive development and stability or conversely, anarchic decline and ultimate demise are realized. It seems abundantly clear that the diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman islands has arrived at such an *intersection*.

### **Towards A (New) Theology of Ministry & Leadership:**

Ability to navigate or lead others in safely negotiating the ‘traffic’ at the *intersection* is neither for the faint-hearted nor the one lacking in visionary acuity. That Fluker has offered this metaphor, by citing ability to *stay awake* as one of the challenges with which leadership in this twenty-first century *global village* must wrestle, highlights an imperative that, given the leadership required for the diocese to become a vibrant and viable ministerial entity, cannot be ignored.

Not only does Fluker's metaphor imply mental and physical acuity, it assumes the spiritual rootedness and discipline spoken of earlier. From a negative perspective, *staying awake* challenges images of fatigue, restlessness and other physical/emotional challenges that imply a dulling of the senses and lack of visionary acuity. In a more positive sense, however, to *stay awake* is not only about these involuntary dis-eases, but speaks rather to an intentional and determined effort that has as a primary objective, cultivation and maintenance of the spiritual and mental sharpness that are germane to achieving the desired goal.

The diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman islands is precariously poised. In the 2011 population census (2011), figures for membership within the diocese highlighted consistent negative growth during the years 2001 - 2011. In fact, whereas non-traditional denominations e.g. Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists registered significant numerical increase over the same period viz. 19.29 % and 14.53 % respectively, the number of Anglicans declined by some 20%. Based on these figures, it seems reasonable to assume a downward trajectory as far as numerical growth is concerned. This grim picture is further compounded by continuing decline among the 35 – 55 age cohorts suggesting that ours is an aging membership with no immediate signs of being renewed.

There is a sense in which these groups, which comprise young professionals and young families, experience great difficulty relating to traditional styles of worship, leadership and general church governance. While these challenges are by no means unique to the diocese, its vitality, viability, visibility and impact rest on its ability to re-assess its leadership capacity along with the methodologies employed in transmitting the Gospel message and therein, affirm a theology of

leadership that is at heart transformational and hence, capable of making the kind of positive moral and social impact for which it was known in its present as well as future endeavours.

Juxtapose that outlined above with the fact that among ordained and non-ordained leaders, continuing education remains optional; with no mandatory requirement for continued learning, security of tenure is guaranteed and with it, the distinct possibility of complacency or worse yet, the kind of autocratic grandstanding that invariably leads to diocesan/congregational disillusionment and demise.

The goal of '*a preferred future*' that fuels the diocesan (re)visioning process, assumes a diocese in which congregations are transformed into viable, mission driven communities, capable of exercising autonomy in the methodologies employed towards the vision's actualization. In light of these and ongoing developments, the time is indeed *ripe* for a revamped theology of ministry and leadership within the diocese.

Archbishop Drexel Gomez, writing on Missional Imperatives for the Anglican Church in the Caribbean, highlights ten basic characteristics of which number seven speaks to the ongoing theological task of identifying and working with the four basic sources of Anglican identity namely: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Culture. He goes further to highlight the fact that within the fourth source i.e. culture, the wider and deeper meanings of context in relation to interpretation, integration, interaction and innovation ought to be engaged in ways that make real, the traditional motif of the *Via Media* in relationship with the policy of Comprehensiveness, both of which characterize the Anglican theological ways of *thought, talk and walk*.

**Conclusion:**

According to Andrew Watson [*The fourfold Leadership of Jesus* BRF 2008] Leadership that is at heart transformational is “*accessible, inspirational, long-term and missional*”. This model finds its significance in relationship with God rather than hierarchical status and/or structures [cf. Philippians 2: 6ff...]. The authenticity and influence of that relationship is then experienced in what has been described by as vulnerable authority. In other words – “*religious leaders must be especially aware of the why of their activity even more so than the “what”*” [Beely & Britton **Anglican Theological Review – Winter 2009, Vol. 91, No. 1,**].

Transformational ministerial leadership, therefore, for which *Christ Crucified* remains its *raison d’être*, (cf. 1 Cor. 2: 1 – 12) cannot allow *anxiety and frustration to become its default position, no matter how much the society it serves marginalises or derides its efforts* [Andrew Watson **Guidelines – Bible Reading Fellowship U.K. 2013**] and therein I daresay, lay the challenge to the exercise of ministry in the diocese.

### **Questions:**

- 1. How does the concept of a *lively faith* inform the kind of ministry required by the diocese at this time?**
- 2. What are some necessary steps to be taken to ensure that by both ordained and non-ordained leaders in the diocese, the ministry exercised is prophetic, relevant and pastoral?**
- 3. Describe some of “*traffic*” being experienced at the “*intersection*” that prevent forward movement along the road of/toward effective ministry; suggest how they may be approached/dealt with?**



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