

## Chaplain's Blog Stardate 25.10.2016

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**Listening and Hearing:** Matthew 17:5: *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"*

I learned many years ago that, when listening to my lovely wife having a moan about something, the last thing she wants is suggestions for answers for how to fix it. She just needs to have a moan and have someone listen to it and then forget about it. (Unless I am expected to remember and do something.... but then that is the lot of a husband – to not quite know what we are supposed to be doing although I am reliably informed that wives sometimes feel that way too)

When asked to picture Jesus, my first thoughts are not of the cross but of the figure leaning against the well chatting to the Samaritan woman or walking through the crowds and turning his head at the moment the woman who needed healing touched his cloak. Jesus must have been an amazing listener. He really knew people and what it would take to lead them and to share his vision. I suspect too many leaders in both secular and religious spheres have wonderful vision but not the listening skills to know their people well enough to take them on that path.

The theme of listening segues neatly into the **Spiritual Direction course!**

So far we have had two Wednesdays at Epiphany house and they have both been quite profound in their own way. We have focused mostly on listening to others on the course rather than being told anything that I did not know about Spiritual Direction but that has just shown what an amazing and diverse group of people they are, ranging from experienced directors to those who are exploring whether they have a vocation for it. A key part of the training involves 'triads', groups of three where one person listens. My trios could not have been more different

to each other with a church warden and a retired priest, a Reader and a Methodist minister and me. The conversations were, quite simply, inspirational.

The whole group was asked for attributes of **Spiritual directors and this is what they came up with:**

Good listener, Compassionate, Accepting, Not judgemental, Keeps confidentiality, Person of prayer, Able to read between the lines ... perceptive, Aware of working of Holy Spirit, Sense of humour, Trustworthy, Humble, Able to be wrong, Prepared to meet you where you are. Honesty about relationship of director and directee, Understands and accepts boundaries, Discerning, Challenging, Having a cutting edge, risk taking... enabling directee to take risks, Broad life experience.... Unshockable, Not afraid of silence, Does not interrupt or pre-empt the answers, Ability to refer back to scriptures and spiritual masters..... Variety of traditions .... Wide knowledge of prayer, Range of spirituality, Not afraid of emotional responses, Hospitable – we incarnate the hospitality of God, Wounded healer? Aware that only God has all the answers, Compatible and approachable.

***Aside:** Intriguingly, the Readers in Training came up with a pretty similar list - but more of them later in the blog. (I wonder if this can count as journaling for the purposes of the Spiritual Direction Course!!)*

The spiritual director's job to be a channel to facilitate the Holy Spirit. They should not be living in their spiritual slippers and dressing gown! They should not be intrusive but be prepared to be entering places you are not ready to explore.

**The Directee should:**

Be coming as a whole person.... God as part of our whole lives.... Unlocking doors and opening cupboards.... Accept that difficult patches are growing patches..... growth points.

Wants to be there, Has a willingness to engage, Is prepared to work (offering and response), Is prepared to be drawn out, to respond, to be changed, to be challenged, to be surprised, to drop some things.... and both must believe God is already working in each person and that God will help set the agenda.

*There is a new Spiritual Direction request form on the website (on the Readers in Training section. Readers' completed forms should be sent Hilary Spong whose details can be found in the diocesan directory.*

**The Readers in Training** have just had their residential weekend on the theme of spirituality. This was also led by Rev Hilary Spong who must be getting fed up with seeing me at Epiphany House! Her material overlapped a little with the Spiritual Direction Course but was hugely challenging for everyone there, trainees and tutors alike.

I actually hate the words training and trainee - they make me think of learning a skill such as applying a triangular bandage, doing a cartwheel or learning how to sit on the carpet and listen to teacher quietly! When we go on courses (CMED) I don't think we expect to be trained but to be given stimuli that will make us think and seek learning for ourselves. Maybe would should have Readers in Learning.... or Learner Readers but then that would be most if us! I suspect I learned as much from Hilary and the 'trainees' (grrr) as anyone did! I have much to mull over and discuss at some stage with my spiritual director!

It was a huge privilege to be able to lead some worship for them, tailored to the themes of the weekend and to take part in the healing communion service at the end. There is something amazingly powerful about the laying on of hands and anointing.

Please do pray for our Readers in Training, it is a huge commitment and they are going to be fantastic Readers (Licensed Lay Ministers).

### Readers' Annual Service



### Prayer used in the Vestry before the Service

I took some of this prayer from the materials on the Central Readers' Council website:

*God our Father, go with us into worship on this special day. We pray your touch upon those leading and serving in this service and especially those being licensed or receiving permission to officiate. In the name of Christ and in the power of your Spirit, we commit ourselves to you and one another, to live, work, and pray as one body in Christ, to trust each other as fellow workers in your Church, and to give ourselves with body, mind, and spirit to the ministry to which you have called us. Give us vision, give us courage, and give us joy, that the world may believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, to your eternal glory. Amen.*



Bishop Chris thanks Chris Kingshott for 14 years service as Chaplain to Readers with Carrie looking on.

What a wonderful celebration it was this year and for me certainly the best annual service I have been to in 30 years although 1988 was memorable for a different reason – my own

licensing. Thanks to Carrie chasing around after providers of everything from certificates to coffee, the morning ran smoothly. I was delighted to be able to help and to take part.



Wendy and Jenny praying in Tandem with the Dean in the background.

The hymns were all singable, there was a lot of Reader participation and the spectacle was regal and affirming!



My only disappointment was that I could not see the pulpit from where I sat and I think it would have been noticed if I had clambered around to a position where I could watch Lydia preach. Canon Jane (director of Reader Training) and I sat opposite one another with a tear or two in our eyes as we listened - pride rather than embarrassment! I think Lydia has set a standard for future preachers at the service. Any volunteers for next year? Anyone doubting that Reader Training prepares people to preach should have heard it!



Charles received Permission to Officiate for the first time. Three Readers reached the milestone of 25 years of service.

William Hazelton is licensed by Bishop Chris. Liz Davey in the background and Jane Osborne in the foreground.

**Resources: Chaplain's New Website – [www.readers-chaplain.org.uk](http://www.readers-chaplain.org.uk)**

On the website I shall post all the past blogs but also resources that might be useful. The Readers in Training have their own section where I will place the powerpoints and handouts. As I train worship leaders (there's that word again) and folks who want to lead intercessions I will also post for them too.

If anyone feels like doing an editorial job for me and checking that hyperlinks go where they are supposed to, that I have not got any dreadful typos or missed the opportunity to post something that would be more useful- please do email me!

Do have a look at..... <http://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/resources.php?c128> as well!

### **Books of the Month**

Of course I am reading material for the Spiritual Directors' course and also for Readers in Training. The ethics element of the course requires "Pastoral Ethics" by David Atkinson which I managed to pick up on Amazon for less than a tenner including P&P.

Jane Kneebone lent me "Instruments of Christ's Love" by Tovey, Buck and Dodds. This is a collection of writings on Reader ministry which ranges from the poetic to the academic but all of which is learned and interesting. I particularly enjoyed Sally Buck's offering. She uses George Lings' seven sacred spaces found in historical monasticism to explore Reader ministry, interspersing her own thoughts with quotes from Readers. I shall have to purchase my own copy!

All theology had to compete with my recreational reading of the Ben Aaronovich series of novels which are highly unsuitable for discussion in a chaplain's letter but I found them riveting with beautifully drawn characters and captivating quirky surreal plots. Ethics could not compete.

### **Dementia Awareness**

<http://www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/forthcoming-conferences/pfs-cornwall-church-conference/>

There is a plethora of resources for the *incredibly important* topic of Dementia Awareness for churches. The link above is for a free conference led by the Pilgrim Friends Society (from Plymouth) at Redruth Baptist Church and advertised here as part of my Churches together role. If you are interested, the link will enable you to book a place.

### **Annual Readers' Day – Bodmin**

I attended the planning meeting for the day which you will have heard about from Carrie's email. We need some group facilitators for worship workshops! These need not necessarily be experts in a particular subject, although it might help, but people who can ensure that discussions move along and that everyone gets a fair chance to take part. Do let Carrie know if you think you might be able to help. We are anxious that as much input should be done by Readers as possible rather than shipping in other 'experts'!

We are going to have a resources display that Shelly Porter is going to organise. She will be there with advice and blutack! We would really like it if people would bring along their favourite resources for others to look at... or indeed a photocopy of at least the cover to act as a signpost!

### **Holding Crosses**

Last month I gave someone a 'holding cross' with some prayers and thoughts for its use because they were finding their faith particularly challenged by illness so I bought some more and gave most of them away to Readers in Training as part of their devotions in the Residential Weekend. These work out at less than a pound each!

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B00I606578/ref=od\\_aui\\_detailpages00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B00I606578/ref=od_aui_detailpages00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)



## Chasing the Quotation

Finally for this month a little poser. Many years ago (probably 1970!), my dad was making suggestions for my on some aspect of primary education that I have long since forgotten. One thing I do remember, or half remember is a quote from, I think, Walter Lippmann which was something like this, "If in the pursuit of the perfect we wreck the best that is possible, then the longing for the absolute is akin to madness!"

No Harvard references here but if anyone does know its provenance I would love to hear it. The quotation, however bears reading, and re-reading, for it is applicable to so many things, not just about academic standards in ten year olds. I wonder if one could apply it to our own ministries and vocations or indeed faith. Sometimes we have to settle for the best we can do and rejoice knowing that Jesus is rejoicing with us and not berate ourselves for not accomplishing miracles and doing everything. That, I suggest, is God's domain.



*Reader Dee Turner gave me this little collage at Molly Brown's Licensing. It amusingly represents my description of Molly in Reader Training sessions as, 'My wise owl'-sitting and listening to everyone else say their piece before asking something challenging! A good lesson for many of us!*

**My focus for prayer this month** has been for Readers (and Readers in training or those contemplating Reader vocation etc.) who are also carers. It is desperately hard to respond to one's vocation if life is taken up caring for a spouse with dementia, a child with a mental illness, a parent with a life threatening illness. Perhaps you could add them to your prayers too if they are not already there.

Do let me know if you would like to be prayed for or if there is anyone on your mind in particular.

Blessings and best wishes

Jim

***PS - Don't forget to tell me if you would like to come to the quiet day being led by Bishop Chris at Epiphany House on December 8<sup>th</sup>. It will begin at 10:00 with refreshments. Please bring a packed lunch, a Bible / something to read and a donation towards the costs of the day. (I am not specifying an amount - that is completely up to your generosity and circumstances!)***