

Intro: “Collaborative Ministry” as a way of describing the task of the community of the Church has a long provenance. It depends on “respectful relationships” and therefore dialogue. Dr Christine Dodds presented its principles at the ACTA open meeting in March 2015.

THE PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

Notes on talk by Dr. Christine Dodd

Introduction

Collaborative Ministry is a slippery phrase. It means different things to different people, ranging from “helping Father” to shared leadership and decision making. Yet it is far more than just the practical arrangements of how we cope with fewer priests or organise our parishes. There is something here to do with renewed vision and respectful relationships and a new understanding of mission. So on what is it built? What are the principles that can help us unpack the words collaborative (or shared) ministry?

I would like to suggest five

1. Living as the communion we call church

The most obvious principle is to do with the church as communion; common-union.

It is a way of relating and working with a common life and focus.

It is based on Paul’s image of the Body in 1Corinthians 12 where there is:

- A single unit but many parts
- Different roles and functions
- Variety of gifts

God is the focus and the giver of gifts and denying people the chance to use their God-given gifts is tantamount to denying the God who is in them.

2. Living in the image of God

If God dwells within the common-union, the church is called to mirror the very reality of God. Here we can have some tentative thoughts about the Trinity. First we talk about the Trinity as relational. So mirroring the life of God in our common-union calls for *relational* living. Yet our theology also says that the three person of the Godhead are *distinctive*. So there should be diversity and clear roles too in our shared ministry. We are diverse people with diverse gifts and callings. Finally the Trinity is *not static*. God is known by what God does. Indeed God’s name is a verb not a noun. So shared ministry is about God taking action through the uniqueness of each one of us.

3. Living within the Revelation of God

We believe Christ is the full revelation of God. But we are continuing to uncover in each generation what that means. Therefore, the people of God are called to try and see and experience God in the whole of life; always uncovering the presence of the Lord in daily life and coming together to celebrate the disclosure of that presence in our lives sacramentally. (Which is why lay liturgical ministries are so important). Parish service both to our own

community and to the wider society in which we live must also be a shared task because God is disclosed through the many and varied situations in which we live.

4. Living out our baptism

A fourth principle is that of living out our baptism. Our incorporation into Christ requires that we live out the priestly, prophetic and kingly life of the Lord who lives in us.

Priestly – Baptism gives us shared but different responsibilities. There is a common priesthood – a call to all to consecrate the world to God by our lives. “The priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood are ordered one to another, each in its own proper way shares the one priesthood of Christ” (Lumen Gentium 10)

Prophetic – A prophet is one who forthtells (not foretells). We are all called to tell forth the message of God. This prophetic task belongs to all. Shared ministry is needed because it is spoken by different voices in different contexts by each one of us.

Kingly – The way the kingdom comes is exercised through all. It is often built in little ways. It needs the Body of Christ with all its gifts and talents for the kingdom to come more fully in each local situation.

5. Living out the Mission of God

Finally, shared ministry has to be based on a vision that the church exists for those who are not members as well as for those who are. “The Church is by her very nature missionary” (Evangeliū Nuntiandi). A community of mutual trust, where diversity is respected and there is a sharing gifts and talents, shows to the wider world that it is possible for a community to be transformed. We are not a group of isolated individuals who happen to meet once a week. We are called to be a company of disciples. This community is responsible for each other *and* for its mission. In that sense we are all in this together, co-responsible for each other’s salvation. We are co-responsible for each other, for building up the community and for sharing what we know and experience with others.

Conclusion

We have a rich treasury of gifts among us. How impoverished we are if they lie unused and unappreciated. I can almost hear you thinking “If only”! There is much that stops us, or hinders us, from putting this vision into action. Working collaboratively is not an option and it is not easy. It is messy, people make mistakes. But sometimes the very messiness allows God to work in unexpected ways. Let the final word go to Pope Francis. He is talking about how the Holy Spirit enriches the entire church with different charisms..

“These gifts are meant to renew and build up the church. They are not an inheritance, safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safe-keeping; rather they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the body of the church, drawn to its centre, which is Christ, and then channelled into an evangelising impulse.” (The Joy of the Gospel 130)

Shared ministry draws us both *in* to Christ and *out* to find him and serve him in the world in which we live. Can we really do it any other way?

Dr. Christine Dodds