

An Exploration of the Circles of Trust[®] model for Leadership Development

Study Leave Project
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Study Leave Project 2009

An Exploration of the Circles of Trust® model for Leadership Development.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR A NUMBER OF THINGS CAME TOGETHER. LAST YEAR MY COLLEAGUE AT THE UNIVERSITY, THE REV JEMMA ALLEN, HAD LOANED ME A BOOK BY PARKER PALMER CALLED A HIDDEN WHOLENESS: *THE JOURNEY TOWARD AN UNDIVIDED LIFE*. THE CONTENT I FOUND SO PROFOUND THAT I ORDERED MY OWN COPY AND IT ARRIVED TOWARDS THE END OF THE YEAR. NOT LONG AFTER I FINISHED READING IT, AND A SECOND ONE OF PALMER'S THE PROMISE OF PARADOX: *A CELEBRATION OF CONTRADICTIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE* THEN THE MARCH/APRIL ISSUE OF WEAVINGS: A JOURNAL OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL LIFE ARRIVED WITH THE WHOLE ISSUE BASED ON THE WORK BEING DONE AT THE CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL WHICH IS THE ORGANIZATION WHICH HAS BUILT UP AROUND PARKER'S METHODOLOGY AND FROM WHICH CONTEXT A HIDDEN WHOLENESS WAS WRITTEN. THAT GAVE ME ACCESS TO THE CENTER'S WEB SITE WHERE I FOUND THE RETREAT PROGRAMME AND THE LIST OF FACILITATORS, WHICH INCLUDED JANET SMITH WHO IS DEPUTY HEAD OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA. FROM CONTACT WITH HER I FOUND THAT SHE WAS LEADING ONE OF THE COURAGE TO LEAD® RETREATS IN JULY OF THIS YEAR.

USING THAT AS THE STIMULUS I APPLIED FOR STUDY LEAVE WHICH WOULD INCLUDE ATTENDING THE RETREAT, REFLECTING ON THE METHODOLOGY AND DO WIDER READING AROUND THE AREA OF LEADERSHIP AND HOW IT MIGHT ALL COME TOGETHER. THE PARISH AND PRESBYTERY MINISTRY COMMITTEE WERE ALL VERY SUPPORTIVE AND HAVE ENCOURAGED ME IN THIS EXPLORATION.

ANOTHER SET OF CONVERSATIONS HELPED FLESH OUT MY PROJECT. THESE WERE WITH MY COLLEAGUE ON THE WAIKATO JRC'S PASTORAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE, THE VEN ANNE MILLS. SHE HAD WORKED FOR HER THESIS ON THE AREA OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH IN NEW ZEALAND AND KNEW OF THE WORK OF PARKER PALMER. SHE HAS GENEROUSLY SUPPLIED ME WITH A WIDE RANGE OF BOOKS ON THE TOPIC AS WELL AS HER THESIS.

A FURTHER STIMULUS CAME FROM MY SUPERVISOR, PAUL FLANAGAN, WHO SAW THE POSSIBILITY OF A PAPER BEING ABLE TO BE OFFERED FOR THE FORTHCOMING NZAC CONFERENCE HERE IN HAMILTON IN SEPTEMBER. THIS HAD A DAUNTING ELEMENT TO IT IN THAT I WAS OFFERING TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING THAT I HADN'T YET EXPERIENCED, BUT IT ALSO HAD THE SPUR OF KEEPING THINGS FOCUSED IN TERMS OF HOW I MIGHT PRESENT THE MATERIAL. PAUL ALSO OFFERED THE SUGGESTION THAT RATHER THAN TRY TO WRITE ONE MAJOR PIECE OF WORK, I MIGHT LOOK AT WRITING A SERIES OF PIECES, (I HESITATE TO CALL THEM ESSAYS AS THEY SEEM TO VARY IN STYLE AND LENGTH) WHICH EXPLORE THE EXPERIENCE AND VARIOUS ISSUES I HAVE IDENTIFIED.

ARMED WITH ALL THIS I SET OUT TO CANBERRA AND PARTICIPATED IN THE RETREAT. IT WAS BASED AT WARRAMBUI RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, A

LUTHERAN CHURCH ENTERPRISE, AT MURRUMBATEMAN, AND IS ABOUT AN HOUR NORTH WEST OF CANBERRA. THIS WAS A THREE-DAY EVENT, FINISHING ON THE SUNDAY AFTERNOON. IT WAS CO-FACILITATED BY JANET SMITH AND SALLY HARE, A FACILITATOR IN THE WORK FROM SOUTH CAROLINA. ON THE MONDAY A GROUP OF US WHO WANTED TO EXPLORE THE ORGANISATIONAL SIDE OF THE WORK IN AUSTRALASIA, MET FOR THE MORNING. THAT FINISHED THE AUSTRALIAN SIDE OF MY EXPERIENCE AND I RETURNED AND DOMICILED MYSELF AT AOTEA HARBOUR FOR THE MAJORITY OF THE REMAINING TIME.

I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING WHO HAVE ASSISTED ME IN THIS PERIOD: SCOTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, FOR RELEASING ME FOR THIS TIME; THE KNOX CENTRE FOR MINISTRY & LEADERSHIP, FOR THE STUDY GRANT; THE BILL AND MARGARET BEST TRAVEL FUND FOR THEIR GRANT; AND THE NEW VISION FOUNDATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN SAVINGS AND DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY FOR THEIR GRANT; AND LEX AND CHRIS GROCOTT FOR THE KIND USE OF THEIR HOUSE ABOVE THE HARBOUR AT AOTEA. ABOVE ALL, I CHERISH THE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN TO ME BY DENISE, MY WIFE AND CONSTANT COMPANION ON THE JOURNEY.

Courage to Lead®

The workshop outline with reflections:

SESSION 1

OPENING CIRCLE – THE COURAGE TO LEAD

EACH CIRCLE BEGAN WITH A “THIRD THING,” USUALLY A POEM WHICH HAD BEEN CHOSEN FOR ITS ABILITY TO ADDRESS THE THEME OF THE SESSION. THE FIRST READING WAS DONE, THEN AN INVITATION TO READ IT AGAIN STANZA BY STANZA AS EACH FELT IT THEIR PIECE TO READ. THIS GAVE A SECOND SET OF VOICES TO HEAR THE PIECE AGAIN. THEN A THIRD READING WHERE A PHRASE OR WORD FROM THE PIECE WAS OFFERED WITH A REFLECTION ON WHAT IT EVOKED. ALL BY INVITATION AND NO DISCUSSION OF WHAT “INTERPRETATION” WAS BEING GIVEN TOOK PLACE. THE KEY WAS IDENTIFYING WHAT WAS EVOKED FROM WITHIN, NOT WHETHER IT WAS A “TRUE” INTERPRETATION OR NOT, AND THEN HEARING THAT IN THE COMPANY OF THE RESPONSES OF OTHERS. ON OCCASION THE FACILITATOR SOMETIMES HAS TO REMIND THE GROUP OF THE VOICE OF THE POEM, OR PIECE OF WORK ITSELF.

CREATING THE CIRCLE

WITHOUT DENYING OR ABANDONING THE OUTER WORLD WE MUST RECLAIM THE REALITY AND POWER OF OUR INNER LIVES. IN A “CIRCLE OF TRUST” WE CREATE A SPACE IN WHICH THE NOISE WITHIN AND THE NOISE AROUND, CAN SUBSIDE AND WE CAN DISCERN THE VOICE OF OUR INNER TEACHER, WHICH WILL ALLOW US TO RECLAIM OUR WHOLENESS.

THE FOCUS OF THE WORK IS THE IDENTITY AND INTEGRITY OF EACH PERSON EACH OF US HAS ACCESS TO AN INNER SOURCE OF TRUTH THAT CAN BE ACCESSED TO GUIDE THE WORK WE DO, BUT ONE OFTEN IGNORED IN OUR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND SERVICE TRAINING.

IN THE TRUSTWORTHY SPACE WE STAY IN RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, NEITHER TRYING TO FIX NOR IGNORING ONE ANOTHER BY SIMPLY LISTENING FOR AND SPEAKING OUR OWN TRUTH WITHOUT FEAR AS OTHERS DO THE SAME.

THERE IS ACTIVE USE OF METAPHORICAL MATERIAL – “THIRD THINGS” – THAT ALLOWS US TO MOVE INTO THE DEEPER QUESTIONS OF MEANING AND PURPOSE IN OUR LIVES THAT ARISE IN OUR WORK AND IN OURSELVES.

WE CREATE A SPACE FOR THE RESPECTFUL, EVOCATIVE AND YET CHALLENGING ENQUIRY ABOUT THE INNER DIMENSIONS OF OUR WORK. ONE OF THE PARADOXES OF THIS WORK IS THAT WHILE WE OURSELVES CAN ONLY DO OUR OWN INNER WORK, WE CAN DO IN THE COMMUNITY OF OTHERS WHAT WE SOMETIMES CANNOT DO ALONE. BY BEING GIVEN A SPACE TO HEAR OUR OWN “INNER TEACHERS” WE ALSO FIND, SURPRISINGLY, THE COURAGE TO LEAD.

What’s in the Heart?

What’s around the Heart?

Begin looking at the disturbances of the heart/soul/spirit.

The focus of the work of the retreat is of creating a safe space for the soul to emerge, so the inner teacher can begin its work.

It is work too "big"

daunting

hard

difficult to do alone

Language about the soul.

From the outside it is the smallest thing

From the inside it encompasses the whole universe and more

THE PROCESS IS EXPLAINED FIRST THROUGH THE FOLLOWING BOUNDARY MARKERS

BE 100% HERE

PRESUME WELCOME AND EXTEND IT ALSO

IT'S NOT ABOUT SHARE OR DIE. IT IS ALWAYS BY INVITATION AND NEVER DEMAND.

SPEAK YOUR TRUTH INTO THE CIRCLE ALWAYS RESPECTING THE TRUTHS OF OTHERS (THIS MEANS NO FIXING!)

WHEN IT IS HARD, TURN TO WONDER

SEE OTHERS AND YOURSELVES WITH "SOFT EYES"

HEAR OTHERS – ESPECIALLY YOURSELF, YOUR OWN INNER TEACHER.

WELCOME SILENCE

LET THE BEAUTY WE LOVE BE WHAT WE DO

PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: USE DEEP AND DOUBLE CONFIDENTIALITY

SOME NOTES:

MANY OF THESE ONCE STATED SEEM OBVIOUS, YET PUT TOGETHER THEY GIVE A DIFFERENT CAST TO THE AMBIENCE THAT IS DEVELOPED.

SOME EXAMPLES:

PRESUME WELCOME. ALL THE PARTICIPANTS HAD IN SOME WAY SOUGHT AN INVITATION AND BEEN GIVEN ONE. YES THERE WAS A FORMAL ENROLMENT PROCESS, BUT THAT WAS IN RESPONSE TO THE INVITATION, SO A WELCOME WAS EXTENDED, AND HAVING HAD ONE EXTENDED TO EACH OF US, IT WAS TO US TO EXTEND THE WELCOME SHARED.

IT'S NOT SHARE OR DIE! THERE IS AN IMAGE OF THE SOUL BEING PRESENT AS A SHY BUT WILD ANIMAL. IF ANYTHING IS FORCED THE SOUL WILL SHY AWAY AND BECOME INACCESSIBLE. HOWEVER, I DISCOVERED THERE IS A COUNTER-INTUITION THAT IS STILL THERE IN THE FORM OF INVITATION. IF I DON'T SHARE, I WILL SURELY DIE!

NO FIXING! WITH A CIRCLE OF MINISTERS, TEACHERS, COUNSELLORS, SCIENTISTS, EDUCATIONALISTS, EXECUTIVES AND CONSULTANTS, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH HIGH "FIXING" ABILITY WAS CONSIDERABLE. FOR MANY OF US INCLUDING MYSELF THIS WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST TEMPTATIONS OF THE WEEKEND. THE PROBLEM WITH THIS TEMPTATION IS THAT IN ATTENDING TO THE "PROBLEM" OF THE OTHER THERE IS A GREAT CHANCE THAT YOU WILL MISS THE LEARNING

BEING OFFERED TO YOU BY YOUR INNER TEACHER. THE SOUL DOESN'T NEED "FIXING"!

WHEN IT IS HARD, WONDER. IN OTHER WORDS SIT WITH THE HARDNESS THAT HAS ARISEN FOR YOU. IT MAY HAVE COME IN RESPONSE TO SOMEONE ELSE'S TRUTH BEING SPOKEN THAT HAS RESONATED WITH YOUR INNER TRUTH. SIT AND WONDER WHY THIS WAS SO.

"SOFT EYES" RECOGNISE THAT IN SEEING THE OTHER SPEAK FROM THEIR TRUTH THEY ARE NOT SAYING ALL OF THEIR STORY, SO THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO LOOK IN JUDGEMENT, TO LOOK WITH "HARD EYES." LOOK WITH LOVE.

WELCOME SILENCE. SO OFTEN IN OUR BUSY LIVES THERE IS THAT HIDDEN AWARENESS OF THE TRAGIC GAP – THAT GAP BETWEEN WHAT IS AND WHAT COULD AND SHOULD BE. WHAT SOMETIMES HAPPENS FOR US IS THAT WE CONSCIOUSLY AVOID ADDRESSING THE ISSUES SURROUNDING OUR "GAP" SO WHEN SILENCE COMES THE QUESTIONS FROM OUR INNER WORLD, (AND SOMETIMES THE OUTER WORLD) ARISE UNBIDDEN AND WE HIDE OURSELVES FROM THEM BY FILLING THE SILENCE WITH NOISE. IN THESE CIRCLES OF TRUST IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR WHAT IS THERE IN THE SILENCE.

DOUBLE CONFIDENTIALITY. THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN THE CLEARNESS COMMITTEES. IT IS WHERE NOT ONLY WHAT IS SAID IN THE GROUP STAYS IN THE GROUP. IT IS WHERE NO ONE FROM THE GROUP CAN COME AND ASK YOU HOW MATTERS PROGRESSED, BUT YOU ARE ABLE TO INITIATE SUCH A CONVERSATION ON "YOUR WORK"

A SABBATH BOX. A SIMPLE DEVICE TO NAME THOSE BURDENS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND OTHER THINGS YOU ARE CARRYING BUT FOR THE TIME OF THE RETREAT BY THE NAMING AND WRITING TO TAKE THEM OFF YOUR SHOULDERS TO BE PICKED UP (IF NECESSARY) AGAIN AS WE LEFT.

SESSION 2

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

The first question brought me up short

What makes me feel most Alive?

THE IMAGES OF BOTH JOURNEY AND DANCE WERE USED TO HELP TURN OUR ATTENTION TO THE SOUL. IN OUR CULTURE UTILITY IS THE THING. HOW THEN DO WE APPROACH THE UTILITY OF THE SOUL? DO WE SEE THE SOUL AS "USEFUL" AND IF WE CAN'T, DO WE THEN IGNORE THE SOUL'S NEEDS IN OUR LIVES.

A JOURNEY OFTEN HAS THE SENSE OF PURPOSE, BUT IT ALSO HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME MUNDANE AND PURPOSELESS, OR DIRE AND DAUNTING. A DANCE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS SOMETHING OF THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE ITSELF BUILT INTO IT. THIS IS PARADOXICALLY SO IN THOSE CULTURES WHICH INCORPORATE DANCE INTO THE CELEBRATIONS AT THE TIME OF DEATH. DEATH HAS COME, BUT STILL LIFE GOES ON LET THE DANCE CONTINUE.

AS OUR RESPONSES WERE BEING SHARED TO THIS MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION, I FOUND MY EYES HARDENING, AND MY FIXING MODE BEGINNING TO OPERATE.

THE AWARENESS OF THIS CAME TO ME SIMPLY AS AN INNER INVITATION, “I DON’T HAVE TO JUDGE! THE QUESTION WAS “WHAT MAKES **ME** FEEL MOST ALIVE?”

I AM UNIQUE SO ONLY I HAVE THE UNIQUE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION FOR ME. THAT FREED ME TO LISTEN TO THE OTHER UNIQUE ANSWERS BEING GIVEN TO THAT QUESTION. WHILE SOME USED THE PREVIOUS ANSWER OR ANSWERS FOR A SPRINGBOARD TO THEIR OWN RESPONSE, THE CIRCLE INVITED ONLY THE SPEAKING OF ONE’S OWN TRUTH INTO ITS CENTRE, NOT AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT OTHERS HAD SAID OR WERE SAYING. AS A RESULT OF THE COMMITMENT TO THAT BOUNDARY MARKER, SOME OF US WERE ABLE TO HEAR OUR OWN TRUTH MUCH MORE CLEARLY.

ONE OF THE TASKS OF THE RETREAT WAS THE BRINGING OF OUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE TOGETHER. IN ORDER TO DO THAT WE NEEDED TO PAUSE ON THE WAY AND RECOGNISE WHAT WE WERE BRINGING ALONG. THIS WAS VARIOUSLY DESCRIBED AS BIRTHRIGHT GIFTS, SEEDS OF THE SELF, SPIRITUAL DNA AND THREADS THAT WOVE INTO THE CLOTH OF OUR LIFE’S JOURNEY.

THE INVITATION WAS TO IDENTIFY FIVE OF THESE AND SHARE IN TRIADS THEM AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR YOU WITH THREE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE OUR REFLECTION.

❧ WHAT WAS IT ABOUT ME AT THIS TIME THAT MADE IT A MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE?

❧ WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THE EVENT, THE OTHER PERSON THAT GAVE IT MEANING?

❧ WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF?

THE REFLECTION BACK FROM THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE TRIAD WAS TO SIMPLY IDENTIFY ONE OR TWO CLEAR IMAGES THAT AROSE OUT OF WHAT WAS SAID THAT MIGHT BE PRESENT AS ONE OF THOSE STRANDS IN THE WHOLE OF OUR LIVING.

SESSION 3

RECONNECTING SOUL AND ROLE

TIME WITH “THE WOODCARVER”

THE TEXT USED WAS THOMAS MERTON’S TRANSLATION FROM LAO TZU *THE WAY OF CHANG TZU*

THE MOST STRIKING IMAGES THAT CAME OUT.

What is the “work before the work,” those practices that allow me to reconnect soul and role?

What do I know about

guarding

nurturing

hearing my spirit?

What is my work before the work?

All who saw it were astounded... all thought of your highness and of the court had faded away.

The place of self-aggrandisement is gone.

The guarding of the spirit relates also to the seduction of the spirit – the blandishments of others leading to its own feeling of self-importance.

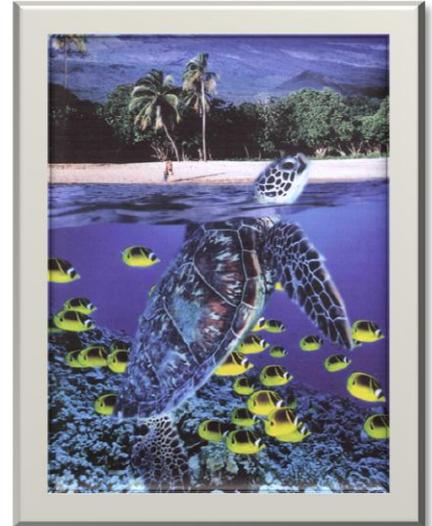
The wood carver experienced a oneness that allowed a natural self-effacement to emerge so that he could concentrate on the task before him.

THE INNER AND OUTER WORK.

WORK WITH THE SPLIT SHOT PHOTOGRAPH OF A TURTLE SURFACING BESIDE A BEACH.

What is happening “above water” in your leadership and life?

What is happening “below water” in your leadership and life at the moment?



THE IMAGE OF THE MÖBIUS STRIP

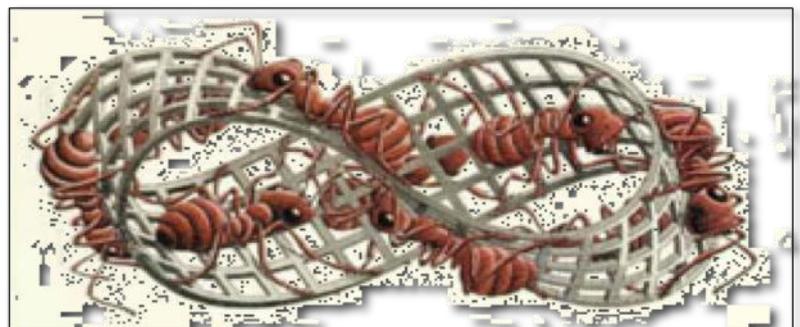
TO HELP US GET A SENSE OF HOW WE OFTEN LIVE DIVIDED LIVES THE MÖBIUS STRIP IS PRESENTED.

WE ARRIVE IN THIS WORLD UNDIVIDED, WHOLE, AND INTEGRAL. AS PART OF OUR NORMAL DEVELOPMENT WE BEGIN TO RECOGNISE THERE IS A WORLD OUT THERE AND AN INNER ONE, THE INNER ONE THAT IS NOT EASY TO LEAVE UNGUARDED AND SO WE ERECT A WALL. WE USE THIS WALL TO PROTECT THE MOST FRAGILE PARTS OF OURSELVES. MANY OF US FIND THAT IT IS IN OUR WORKING LIVES THAT NEED IS HIGHEST, BUT IN REINFORCING IT FOR PUBLIC ASSAULT, THAT MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT TO DISMANTLE IT IN THE COMPANY OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AND FURTHER IT ALLOWS US TO KEEP OURSELVES HIDDEN FROM OURSELVES AS WELL. THERE IS ANOTHER TRAGIC GAP DEVELOPING, THAT OF OUR ONSTAGE PERFORMANCE AND THE BACKSTAGE REALITY.

RECOGNISING THIS WE BEGIN A SEARCH FOR INTEGRATION, THE YEARNING TO BE CENTRED. WE FOLD THE WALL AROUND US LIKE A RING. HOWEVER THERE IS STILL AN “INSIDE” AND AN “OUTSIDE” AND WHEN WE HEAR OUR TRUTH FROM WITHIN WE CAN USE THIS TO MAINTAIN A DIVIDED LIFE, FALLING SHORT OF OPENHEARTED ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD.

IF WE TAKE THE STRIP AND GIVE ONE TWIST AND JOIN THE ENDS WE NOW HAVE SOMETHING ELSE, A MÖBIUS STRIP. THIS IS A FORM THAT HAS NO INSIDE OR OUTSIDE. IT IS A METAPHOR FOR LIFE ITSELF – ULTIMATELY THERE IS ONE REALITY, THERE IS NO INNER AND NO OUTER. WE ARE CONSTANTLY ENGAGED IN A SEAMLESS EXCHANGE BETWEEN WHATEVER IS “OUT THERE” AND WHATEVER IS “IN HERE.”

THE IMPLICATIONS ARE PROFOUND IN A CULTURE THAT SEPARATES INNER FROM OUTER, PRIVATE FROM PUBLIC, PERSONAL FROM PROFESSIONAL. IT SUGGESTS THAT THESE ARE NEVER SEPARATED. IN FACT THE LACK OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT SUCH A STATE OF AFFAIRS EXISTS CREATE UNSAFE



M.C. Escher's woodcut "Möbius Strip II"

SITUATIONS WHERE WE THINK WE CAN MASK WHO WE ARE, WHERE WE DELUDE OURSELVES, MASKING THE SITUATION LESS TRUSTWORTHY FOR OTHERS, AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE SENSE OF DANGER THAT INHIBITS OTHERS FROM INVESTING OF THEMSELVES.

RECOGNISING THIS ALLOWS US TO BECOME INTEGRATED, WHOLE. OF COURSE IT IS A DIFFERENT SORT OF WHOLENESS TO THAT OF A NEWBORN CHILD. IT WOULD BE FACILE TO TRY TO REDUCE IT TO “EMBRACING THE INNER CHILD.” AS ADULTS WE HAVE BURDENS AND CHALLENGES THAT CHILDREN HAVE YET TO COME TO – THE BURDEN OF FAILURES, BETRAYALS AND GRIEFS; THE CHALLENGES OF OUR SKILLS AND GIFTS, OF OUR VISIONS. WE MUST LEARN ANEW HOW TO NEGOTIATE LIFE GRACEFULLY AND SOUL-FULLY.

PREPARATION FOR THE CLEARNESS COMMITTEE.

EACH COMMITTEE HAS A FOCUS PERSON WHO BRINGS AN ISSUE RELATING TO THEIR PERSONAL LIFE OR WORK (OR BOTH) THEY WANT CLARITY ON. COMMITTEES ARE SMALLER CIRCLES OF TRUST MADE UP OF THE FOCUS PERSON AND IDEALLY BETWEEN FOUR TO SIX PEOPLE. THE TASK FOR THE FOCUS PERSON IS THREE-FOLD.

- IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM AS BEST AS ABLE
- OFFERING BACKGROUND INFORMATION THAT BEARS DIRECTLY ON THE PROBLEM
- NAMING WHATEVER CLUES THERE MAY BE ON THE HORIZON ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE HEADED WITH THE PROBLEM.

THERE IS NO NEED FOR A FULL AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS THAT WILL TAKE TOO LONG AND WILL STILL ONLY BE A SELECTIVE PRESENTATION OF YOUR LIFE NARRATIVE.

ONE REFLECTION FROM A NARRATIVE THERAPIST AT THE WEEKEND HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS A BIT BETTER. THEIR SKILLS WERE DIRECTED AT ANALYTICAL LISTENING. IN TERMS OF THE THREADS WE USED EARLIER. THEY SPOKE IN TERMS OF KEEPING THE THREAD. THIS PROCESS WAS ONE OF ENGAGED LISTENING, OF SIMPLY LISTENING TO THE PERSON AND LISTENING FOR THE TRUTH WITHIN THEMSELVES.

THE ANALYTICAL LISTENER WAS, FROM ONE PERSPECTIVE, KEEPING THE THREAD ALL RIGHT, BUT KEEPING THE FOCUS PERSON'S THREAD ON THEIR OWN LOOM WHICH CREATES A POWER IMBALANCE AND IS NOT HELPFUL IN THIS PROCESS. IN THIS ENGAGED LISTENING PROCESS THE TASK OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBER WAS TO LOOK AFTER THEIR THREAD WHILE THE FOCUS PERSON LOOKED AFTER THEIRS.

EVEN THOUGH THE GROUP HADN'T BEEN TOGETHER FOR MORE THAN AN EVENING AND A MORNING, THE FOCUS PERSONS WERE ASKED WHETHER THERE WERE ANY PARTICULAR MEMBERS THEY WANTED OR DIDN'T WANT ON THEIR COMMITTEE. NO REASONS WERE ASKED FOR EITHER WAY.

THE COURAGE FOR RENEWAL CENTER RUNS A TWO-YEAR SERIES OF 8 RETREATS WHERE THE COMMITTEES ARE ESTABLISHED AND SET FOR THE WHOLE PERIOD. EACH OF THESE WAYS OFFERS A DIFFERENT SET OF INSIGHTS. THE SINGLE RETREAT ALLOWS THE FOCUS PERSON TO HEAR FROM THE DIVERSITY THAT IS PRESENT. THE EIGHT-RETREAT PATTERN ALLOWS FOR THE UNFOLDING OF THE EXPLORATION BY EACH MEMBER IN THE COMPANY OF FAMILIAR PEOPLE. EACH HAS ITS LIMITATIONS AND EACH HAS ITS STRENGTHS.

THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATORS IN THIS SETTING IS CRUCIAL AS THEY TRY TO MATCH UP PARTICIPANTS FROM THE PERSONAL STATEMENTS AND THE PREFERENCES OF THE FOCUS PERSON. THE SECOND ASPECT IS THE PREPARATION OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND FOCUS PEOPLE IN THE CIRCLE OF TRUST SO THAT EVERYONE KNOWS THE PROCESS.

- THE FIRST QUARTER HOUR OF THE TWO-HOUR PERIOD IS FOR THE FOCUS PERSON TO DESCRIBE THEIR ISSUE WITHOUT INTERRUPTION. ONCE AGAIN THERE IS AN EMPHASIS ON THE USE AND WELCOMING OF SILENCE. FOR SOME FOCUS PEOPLE IT WOULD BE THE FIRST TIME THEY MAY HAVE VOICED THEIR ISSUE OUT LOUD AND NEED TO HEAR IT THEMSELVES AS WELL.
- AFTER THAT PERIOD IS OVER THEN THE NEXT HOUR AND A HALF IS FOR QUESTIONS ONLY, AND NOT JUST ANY SORT OF QUESTION. THE ONLY WAY COMMITTEE MEMBERS MAY SPEAK IS TO ASK BRIEF, HONEST AND OPEN QUESTIONS. THE QUESTIONS SHOULD BE GENTLY PACED WITH PERIODS OF SILENCE BETWEEN QUESTION AND RESPONSE. QUESTIONS SHOULD NOT POINT TO POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS THAT YOU THINK YOU SEE. NOR SHOULD THEY SIMPLY BE ASKED TO SATISFY CURIOSITY. RATHER THEY ARE THERE TO SUPPORT THE FOCUS PERSON'S INNER JOURNEY. OPEN, HONEST QUESTIONS ARE QUESTIONS YOU DON'T OR CAN'T KNOW THE ANSWER. AS WELL AS THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO NON-VERBAL ENGAGEMENT. OUR TENDENCY IS TO LOOK AT THE RESPONSES WE GIVE TO QUESTIONS, OR TO GET CUES AS TO THE NEXT QUESTION. NONE OF THIS IS NECESSARY IN THIS SPACE AS THE GOAL IS TO COMMUNICATE WITH TRUE SELF, NOT OTHER PEOPLE. THE ONLY RESPONSES THAT COUNT ARE THOSE FROM WITHIN THE FOCUS PERSON. THIS ENCOURAGES TRUTHFUL SPEAKING AND RECEPTIVE LISTENING. THIS HELPS DRAW THE FOCUS PERSON INTO A SPACE THAT HONOURS AND WELCOMES THE SOUL, AND THE REALISATION THAT BECAUSE IN THIS PLACE NO ONE ELSE NEEDS TO BE CONVINCED OF ANYTHING, THERE IS NO ONE LEFT TO FOOL EXCEPT MYSELF. TO HEAR YOURSELF TRULY IN SUCH A PLACE IS A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE.
- AT THE CONCLUSION OF THAT TIME THE FOCUS PERSON IS ASKED WHETHER THEY WANT MORE QUESTIONS OR WHETHER THEY ARE READY FOR MIRRORING. THIS HAS THREE FORMS. THE FIRST IS TO MIRROR BACK A QUESTION AND THEIR ANSWER; BOTH BEING DIRECT QUOTES AND NOT PARAPHRASES. THE SECOND IS TO QUOTE TWO OR THREE ANSWERS GIVEN INVITING THE FOCUS PERSON TO LOOK AT THEM IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER. DOING THIS SUGGESTS A PATTERN BUT THIS MAY NOT BE HINTED AT IN ANY WAY. WHETHER THE FOCUS PERSON SEES SUCH IS UP TO THEM, AND WHETHER THEY REFLECT OUT LOUD OR NOT IS ALSO UP TO THEM. THE LAST FORM OF MIRRORING RELATES TO THE FOCUS PERSON'S BODY LANGUAGE. THIS CAN BE DESCRIBED TO THEM CLEARLY BUT NOT INTERPRETED.
- IN THE LAST FIVE MINUTES THE COMMITTEE THEN OFFERS AFFIRMATIONS AND CELEBRATIONS. THE CLOSING OFF OF THE WORK HAS TWO OTHER BITS TO IT. THE FIRST IS THAT ALL THE NOTES AND JOTTINGS THAT THE COMMITTEE MADE TO HELP KEEP TRACK OF THE QUESTIONS AND

JOURNEY OVER THE TWO HOURS ARE GIVEN TO THE FOCUS PERSON. LATER ON THIS WILL PROVIDE THEM WITH MORE ASSISTANCE AS THEY CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THE ISSUE AND SEE AGAIN WHAT THEIR SOUL WAS SAYING AT THAT TIME. THE SECOND IS A REMINDER ABOUT THE DOUBLE CONFIDENTIALITY. HAVING BEEN IN SUCH AN INTIMATE SPACE WITH ANOTHER THE TEMPTATION IS THERE TO WANT TO FOLLOW UP WITH PARTS OF THE PROCESS.

THE IMAGE THAT IS PRESENTED TO THE COMMITTEE BEFORE THEY GO OFF IS THAT THEY ARE TO HOLD THE SOUL OF THE FOCUS PERSON AS IF HOLDING A SMALL BIRD IN THE PALMS OF THE HANDS. IT IS AN IMAGE THAT HELPS WITH THE THREE TEMPTATIONS. ONE IS HAVING OUR HANDS CLOSE AROUND THE BIRD AND THEN TRYING TO SEE WHAT MAKES IT TICK. THE SECOND IS TO GET TIRED OF HOLDING IT AND LAY THE BIRD DOWN. IF THIS HAPPENS THEN WE ARE NO LONGER HOLDING THE SOUL OF THE OTHER AT THE CENTRE OF OUR AWARENESS. LASTLY, ESPECIALLY TOWARDS THE END OF THE PROCESS, WE MAY FIND OUR CUPPED HANDS WANTING TO SUBTLY ENCOURAGE THE BIRD TO FLY. THE SOUL BEING HELD WILL KNOW WHEN IT IS TIME TO FLY.

SESSION 4

RESTING AND REFLECTING ON THE JOURNEY – A TIME OF SOLITUDE.

FOR THOSE OF US WHO WERE TO BE FOCUS PEOPLE WE WERE ADVISED TO USE THE BEGINNING OF THE TIME TO CLARIFY AS BEST WE COULD OUR ISSUES AND THEN USE THE REST OF THE TIME FOR REST. FIRST I WROTE OUT THE ISSUE TO BE EXPLORED, SUMMARISING AS BEST I COULD THE MAIN THREADS. I THEN FOUND MY MEDITATIVE DISCIPLINE WORKED AND PREPARED ME TO BE OPEN TO WHAT FOLLOWED

SESSION 5

CLEARNESS COMMITTEES – THE PARADOX OF TAKING THE INDIVIDUAL JOURNEY IN COMMUNITY.

IN REREADING THE NOTES TAKEN DURING MY TIME AS A FOCUS PERSON I WAS SURPRISED AND EVEN A LITTLE OVERWHELMED AT WHAT I COVERED IN THE HOUR AND A HALF.

THE TIME SPED BY. IT WAS AS IF WE HAD HAD TIME SUSPENDED FOR THAT PERIOD.

THE QUESTIONS?

I FOUND NEARLY ALL WERE HELPFUL, EVEN THOSE THAT WEREN'T AS BRIEF AS THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN. I HAD A COMMITTEE OF FIVE. DESPITE A SENSE THAT A COUPLE OF THEM WANTED TO "FIX" SOME THINGS FOR ME INITIALLY, BY USING SILENCE AND REFLECTION BEFORE ANSWERING ALOUD, I WAS ABLE TO USE THEIR QUESTIONS. THE SIMPLE THING WAS THAT THEY WERE THERE TO SUPPORT ME IN MY SEARCH AND WERE TRYING THEIR BEST TO DO THAT. ALL I HAD TO DO WAS TRUST THAT THAT WAS SO, AND IT WAS, AND I DID.

THE MOST DIFFICULT PART WAS MY WANTING TO ENGAGE THEM BY EYE CONTACT. I HAD POSITIONED MYSELF SO THAT I HAD THE LATE AFTERNOON AND EARLY EVENING LIGHT COMING INTO MY EYES AND THAT MEANT TOO THAT THEIR FACES WERE CAST IN SHADOW. ONCE WE GOT UNDERWAY

THOUGH, NONE OF THAT SEEMED TO MATTER AS I SEARCHED AND QUESTIONED MY INNER SELF.

THE REAL SURPRISE WAS FINDING THAT HAVING STRUGGLED WITH THE PROBLEM THE WAY I HAD OUTLINED AND SHAPED AND DEFINED IT, THAT IT WAS NOT THE ISSUE I NEEDED TO WORK ON. FROM MY READING AND FROM OUR FACILITATORS I UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS WAS NOT NECESSARILY A FAILURE OF THE PROCESS. RATHER, BY BEING ABLE TO HEAR MY INNER SELF IT HAS GIVEN ME A CLEARER PATH TO EXPLORE.

THE MIRRORING WAS THE REAL SURPRISE FOR ME. I WAS HEARING THE WORDS AND FINDING THEM ALL WELL AND GOOD, BUT THE ONE MIRROR HELD UP ABOUT MY BODY LANGUAGE RESPONSE FOR ONE QUESTION GAVE ME MORE INSIGHT THAN ANYTHING ELSE I RECEIVED THAT AFTERNOON AND CONFIRMED MY FEELING THAT THE ISSUE WAS A SMOKESCREEN FOR SOMETHING ELSE.

SESSION 6

DANCING WITH PARADOX AND HOPE

THE SESSION BEGAN WITH A DEBRIEFING ABOUT THE COMMITTEE PROCESS. ONE OF THE COMMON THREADS THAT CAME OUT WAS HOW SOME MEMBERS OFTEN FOUND THAT THEIR FOCUS PERSON WAS WRESTLING WITH THE SAME SORTS OF ISSUES. HAVING BEEN PREPARED BEFOREHAND THEY FOUND THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO SIT WITH THE FOCUS PERSON AND SUPPORT THEM WHILE AT THE SAME TIME WORKING ON THEIR OWN STUFF AS THEIR SOUL SPOKE IN THE SAME SAFE PLACE, EVEN AS THEIR FOCUS WAS ON ANOTHER'S SOUL.

THE CENTER FOR RENEWAL® PROGRAM HAS DEVELOPED A SERIES BASED ON THE SEASONS, ESPECIALLY AS THE SEASONS ARE EXPERIENCED IN THE AMERICAN MIDWEST. THEY BEGIN IN THE AUTUMN OR FALL, THEN FOLLOW THROUGH TO SUMMER. THERE IS A ONE YEAR AND A TWO YEAR CYCLE. IN THE COLD WINTER OF WARRAMBUI WE EXPLORED THE THEMES OF THE WINTER RETREAT – PARADOX AND HOPE. MUCH OF WHAT WAS SPOKEN IS CONTAINED IN PARKER PALMERS EARLY BOOK THAT HAS RECENTLY BEEN REPRINTED, “THE PROMISE OF PARADOX”

ONE OF THEIR FACILITATORS IS OFFERING THE FOLLOWING ONE YEAR SERIES:

FALL RETREAT: *DISCOVERING THE SEEDS OF TRUE SELF.*

WINTER RETREAT: *EMBRACING THE PARADOX OF DORMANCY AND DEEP GROWTH.*

SPRING RETREAT: *RENEWAL IN THE MIDST OF MUCK AND MIRE.*

SUMMER RETREAT: *LIVING AN ABUNDANT LIFE.*

FINAL RETREAT: *SUSTAINING COURAGE FOR ALL SEASONS.*

A PARADOX IS AN APPARENT CONTRADICTION
A CONTRADICTION IS A CONTRADICTION.
THE SKILL IS TO DISCERN WHICH IS WHICH.

THE JOURNALING EXERCISE FOCUSED ON WINTER – A TIME OF...

DEATH AND RE-BIRTH
THE OUTLIVED AND THE
UNLIVED

WE WERE INVITED...

*to see what has been outlived in our life and leadership
to explore what is unlived, yet to be born right now
to identify any paradoxes in these current changes
to acknowledge what gives us hope as we face these changes*

SESSION 7

BRIDGE TO THE WORLD – TAKING OUR INNER SELVES INTO OUR OUTER WORLDS

THE FIRST ELEMENT IN THIS SESSION WAS A RETELLING OF THE WEEKEND USING IMAGES AND RECOLLECTION.

IT WAS A KIND OF TIME TRAVEL THAT ENCAPSULATED THE WEEKEND IN A MOMENT'S SPEAKING, YET AT THE SAME TIME THAT MOMENT ENCOMPASSED THE WHOLE OF THE TIME TOGETHER.

THERE WAS THE RITUAL SHARING OF INSIGHTS, FEELINGS AND STRUGGLINGS. THERE WAS A GENTLE UNFOLDING OF US ALL. IT WAS REMARKED BY MORE THAN ONE THAT WE ALL LOOKED YOUNGER AND MORE VITAL THAN WHEN WE ARRIVED ON THE FRIDAY NIGHT. AND IT WASN'T JUST BECAUSE WE WERE USING OUR "SOFT EYES."

EVEN THOUGH I MAY NOT HAVE HAD THE SAME INSIGHTS, THE FACT THAT OTHERS AROUND ME HAVE HAD CLARITY PROMISES THAT THE PROCESS FAITHFULLY AND SOULFULLY ATTENDED TO WILL BRING ME CLARITY AND INSIGHT.

I AM UNIQUE AND MY INSIGHT WILL BE UNIQUE TO ME. WHILE OUR SOULS MELD FOR A TIME IN THIS SACRED SPACE IT IS MY SOUL'S TRUTH THAT WILL FREE ME, HEAL ME, INSPIRE ME.

A FINAL REFLECTIVE JOURNALING EXERCISE WAS WRITING A LETTER TO OURSELVES.

How have you met yourself at the retreat?

What new glimpses did you find during this time?

What are you taking with you?

What are you leaving behind?

What do you want to remember?

What are a few small ways you can continue to attend to yourself and the things you identified this weekend?

A CONVERSATION ABOUT COURAGE AND RENEWAL WORK.

COURAGE TO LEAD, TEACH, WORK FOR PROFESSIONALS UNDER SIEGE.

SOCIAL WORKERS, COUNSELLORS, TEACHERS, CLERGY, NFP SECTOR WORKERS

THE METHODOLOGY DOESN'T NEED THE FACILITATORS TO BE EXPERTS IN THE PARTICULAR FIELDS.

THE CRITICAL THING ABOUT THE WORK IS THAT IT IS ABOUT YOU WORKING AS WHO YOU ARE.

JANET HAD SPENT TIME WITH THE CENTER AND EVALUATED THEIR CROSS-PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMME COURAGE TO LEAD. OVERWHELMINGLY THE RESPONSES CAME BACK THAT THE RETREATS WORKED STUNNINGLY WELL.

THE PROGRAMME IS NORTH AMERICA BASED AND HAS NO PLANS TO EXPAND AND IN FACT IT HAS TAKEN SINCE 1992 TO GROW TO THE POINT WHERE THERE ARE ABOUT 180 FACILITATORS. ONE OF THE KEYS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FACILITATORS IS A STRONG MENTORING PROCESS.

HOWEVER, SINCE PARKER PALMER WROTE A HIDDEN WHOLENESS THE METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS IS OUT IN THE OPEN AND CAN BE USED AND ADAPTED BY ANYONE. THE CENTER IS ADAPTING TO THAT IN TWO WAYS. ONE IS IT IS THERE AS A RESOURCE AND THE OTHER IS IT IS WHERE THE WORK IS INTENTIONALLY DONE WITH THOSE COMMITTED TO THE ONGOING WORK.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO USE THE CIRCLES OF TRUST PROCESS IN A GENERIC WAY, BUT CIRCLES OF TRUST®, COURAGE TO LEAD® AND THE CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL® ARE ALL REGISTERED MARKS AND THOSE PHRASES CANNOT BE USED WITHOUT THEIR EXPRESS PERMISSION.

THE FEELING WAS THAT A MINIMUM OF 10 AND A MAXIMUM OF 30 PARTICIPANTS IN A CIRCLE PROCESS WOULD BE THE RANGE WITH 20-24 AS THE SWEET SPOT. SALLY'S REFLECTION ON THAT RANGE WAS THAT THE LARGER THE GROUP THE MORE SKILLED THE FACILITATOR NEEDED TO BE.

SESSION 8

CLOSING CIRCLE

MANY RETREATS ARE MORE ABOUT ESCAPE THAN ENGAGEMENT AND GIVE PARTICIPANTS A MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE THAT CANNOT BE SUSTAINED FOR LONG. PARKER PALMER REFLECTED ON THIS FOR A TIME BEFORE RECOGNISING THAT THE DYNAMIC WAS ONLY PARTLY CAUSED BY OUR OWN FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY. RATHER THEY WERE SETUPS FOR DESPAIR. HAVING DRAWN THE SOUL OUT, THE SOUL HAS TO BE ALLOWED TO WITHDRAW ALSO.

HE PUTS IT THIS WAY IN A HIDDEN WHOLENESS

“WHEN WE LEAVE A CIRCLE OF TRUST, WE RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE—OR ANY OTHER ARENA OF LIFE—BETTER ABLE TO ENGAGE IT IN LIFE-GIVING WAYS. THE INNER WORK WE HAVE DONE IN THAT CIRCLE REMINDS US THAT WE ARE CONSTANTLY COCREATING THE WORLD, SO WE NEED NOT BE VICTIMS OF IT. NOW WE GO INTO MONDAY MORNING WITH NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE ANCIENT ADMONITION ‘I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU LIFE AND DEATH, BLESSING AND CURSE: THEREFORE CHOOSE LIFE.’¹

AND FINISHES THE BOOK THIS WAY:

“KNOWING WITH FULL CLARITY THAT THE GIFT OF LIFE IS OURS ONLY FOR A WHILE, WE CHOOSE TO LIVE ‘DIVIDED NO MORE’ SIMPLY BECAUSE IT WOULD BE FOOLISH NOT TO. AS WE LIVE INTO THAT CHOICE, WE SEE

¹ P.168. Palmer, P. J. (2004). *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

WITH NEW CLARITY THAT ALL LIFE AROUND US IS “SOMETHING PRECIOUS TO THE EARTH,” AND WE FIND MORE AND MORE WAYS TO HONOUR THE SOUL IN OURSELVES AND IN EVERY MORTAL CREATURE.”²

SO WE BLESSED EACH OTHER IN WORD AND SILENCE, BLEW OUT THE CANDLE, THOSE OF US WHO NEEDED TO PICKED UP OUR BURDENS FROM THE SABBATH BOX, AND WE WENT OFF TO LUNCH AND BACK OUT INTO THE WORLD WITH A RECONNECTION TO OUR SOULS, WITH COURAGE AND A HOPE THAT WE WOULD WALK MUCH MORE LIGHTLY ON THE EARTH.

AN ORGANISATIONAL POSTSCRIPT.

ON THE MONDAY MORNING A GROUP OF US MET TO EXPLORE ISSUES AROUND THE PROGRAMME AND HOW IT MIGHT BE DEVELOPED IN AN AUSTRALASIAN SETTING.

EACH OF US REFLECTED SOMETHING OF THE NEED FOR MORE READY ACCESS TO THIS KIND OF WORK.

THERE WAS A CONGRUENCE WHICH HAD US ALL TOGETHER WITH THE SAME DESIRES FOR SOME NAMED &/OR UNNAMED FUTURE.

WITHOUT TRYING A GROUP HAD EMERGED FROM THE NEEDS OF OUR INDIVIDUAL SPHERES AND SYSTEMS.

A PROCESS FOR THE WAY FORWARDS NEEDED TO BE PARALLEL WITH THE PROCESS FOR THE CIRCLES OF TRUST. IN OTHER WORDS THERE NEEDED TO BE INTENTIONALITY, BOUNDARIES AND SAFETY IN THE WAY WE PROCEEDED.

THERE WAS QUITE A BIT OF DISCUSSION ABOUT THE METAPHORS NEEDED DOWN UNDER, THAT THEY NEEDED TO WORK. SALLY'S REFLECTION WAS THAT GOING FROM SOUTH CAROLINA TO WISCONSIN WAS AS MUCH OF A CULTURE AND SEASONAL DISLOCATION AS FROM SOUTH CAROLINA TO CANBERRA. IN TERMS OF THE SEASONAL SERIES WE DO NEED TO DISCERN OUR OWN METAPHORS AND WHAT THE DIFFERENT SEASONS BRING HERE. THERE MAY BE POINT IN TURNING TO MAORI OR ABORIGINAL NAMING OF THE SEASONS.

SALLY ALSO SPOKE ABOUT THE MOVEMENT MODEL THAT PARKER HAS OUTLINED IN THE LAST CHAPTER OF COURAGE TO TEACH. BRIEFLY STATED IT GOES LIKE THIS

1. AN INDIVIDUAL IS NO LONGER WILLING TO LIVE A DIVIDED LIFE. THEY HAVE REALISED THAT THERE IS NO EXTERNAL SANCTION OR PUNISHMENT THAT CAN BE WORSE THAN WHAT THEY ARE DOING TO THEMSELVES.
2. THEY THEN LOOK TO FIND OTHERS, TO FIND A COMMUNITY OF CONGRUENCE. HERE IS WHERE WE COULD SEE THE PLACE FOR CIRCLES OF TRUST AS OPPOSED TO CIRCLES OF TRUST. HOWEVER, HERE IS ALSO BUILT UP A RUDIMENTARY ORGANISATION IN ORDER TO PROVIDE MUTUAL SUPPORT.
3. THEN THE MOVEMENT GOES PUBLIC, COMES OUT INTO THE OPEN. THIS IS A DANGEROUS STAGE BECAUSE THE GROUP POTENTIALLY HAS NO CONTROL OVER WHAT HAPPENS.
4. THERE ARE FOUND TO BE ALTERNATIVE REWARDS AS PEOPLE REALISE THE OLD WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS ARE NO LONGER WORKING. IT IS IMPORTANT TO LIVE SUSTAINABLY ON THE PLANET IN COMMUNITY WITH OTHERS SIMILARLY MINDED.

² P. 186. Ibid.

HERE RESTS ANOTHER OF THOSE PARADOXES BETWEEN MOVEMENT AND ORGANISATION. THE CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL IS NOW THE ORGANISATION THAT SUPPORTS THE MOVEMENT. MOVEMENTS ALWAYS HAVE LEADERS PLURAL. IN THIS CASE WHILE PARKER HAS BEEN THE OBVIOUS GUIDE HE HAS NOT DEVELOPED THE WORK ALONE AND IS NOT THE GURU.

TO USE A GARDENING IMAGE.

GROWTH IN A GARDEN COMES FROM THE PLANTING OF SEEDS IN PREPARED GROUND.

THIS IS LIKE THE CENTER WITH ITS INTENTIONAL FACILITATOR PREPARATION AND INTENSIVE MENTORING.

THERE IS ANOTHER WAY AND THAT IS FROM THE NATURAL SCATTERING OF THE SEEDS AND THEIR BEING CARRIED TO WHEREVER THEY WILL GROW.

THIS IS LIKE A HIDDEN WHOLENESS. PARKER HAS SHAKEN THE WORK OUT INTO THE WORLD AND OTHERS ARE NOW STARTING TO GROW AND DEVELOP THE WORK ALSO.

FACILITATION IS THE KEY TO IT ALL. LEADERS CAN'T BRING THEIR OWN STUFF INTO THE CIRCLE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME THEY MUST DO SOME OF THEIR OWN WORK IN THE CIRCLE (PARADOX AGAIN!).

THE CENTER PROCESS FOR FACILITATION PREPARATION CARRIES ONGOING DISCERNMENT UPON ENTERING, DURING AND AFTER TRAINING.

FINALLY A COMMENT ON THE CIRCLES OF TRUST PROCESS.

THIS HAS DEVELOPED INTO A THREE STAGE RETREAT CYCLE.

- CIRCLE OF TRUST I: LIVING THE UNDIVIDED LIFE
- CIRCLE OF TRUST II: LIVING THE QUESTIONS. HOW TO GET PEOPLE TO THE PLACE OF ASKING OPEN, HONEST QUESTIONS NOT JUST IN CIRCLES OF TRUST BUT IN EVERYDAY LIFE.
- CIRCLE OF TRUST III: LIVING A THIRD WAY. LIFE IN THE TRAGIC GAP

THIS ALLOWS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK WITHIN FOR EACH PARTICIPANT AND STRENGTHENS THEIR ABILITY TO CARRY ON THE WORK IN THE COMMUNITIES AND WORK SETTINGS THEY COME FROM.

Further Reflections

I HAVE DESCRIBED THE SHAPE OF THE WEEKEND, NOW I WANT TO REFLECT ON HOW I GOT THERE AND WHAT I RECEIVED OUT OF THE EXPERIENCE.

I HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR A NEW WAY TO APPROACH THE TASK OF LEADERSHIP IN THE PARISH. IN A CONVERSATION WITH MY COLLEAGUE JEMMA ALLEN LAST YEAR, SHE REFERRED ME TO THE WORK OF PARKER PALMER THROUGH THE BOOK "A HIDDEN WHOLENESS." THIS SEEMED PROVIDENTIAL AS IT ADDRESSED MANY OF THE THEMES THAT I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO ADDRESS. OF PARTICULAR INTEREST WERE HIS CIRCLES OF TRUST AND CLEARNESS COMMITTEES WHICH SEEMED TO ME A DIFFERENT WAY OF APPROACHING THE ISSUES OF GROUP DYNAMICS.

AT THAT STAGE I SIMPLY SAT WITH WHAT I HAD READ AND AT THE SAME TIME BOUGHT HIS EARLY WRITING ON THE PLACE OF FAITH IN COMMUNITY CALLED "THE PROMISE OF PARADOX." THEN IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR MY COPY OF WEAVINGS: A JOURNAL OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR MARCH/APRIL ARRIVED. THIS ISSUE FOCUSSED ON THE WORK OF PARKER AND THE CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL, PARTICULARLY AS IT RELATED TO THEIR COURAGE TO LEAD SERIES OF RETREATS.

THIS PROVIDED NOT ONLY MORE MATERIAL TO PONDER AND MEDITATE ON BUT IT ALSO PROVIDED A LINK TO THE CENTER'S WEB SITE AND RETREAT PROGRAMME. IN LOOKING AT THE RANGE OF FACILITATORS I DISCOVERED THAT THERE WAS ONE SUCH PERSON IN OUR PART OF THE WORLD, JANET SMITH, DEPUTY HEAD OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA. I CONTACTED HER TO FIND SHE WAS RUNNING A RETREAT IN JULY OF THIS YEAR SO I ENROLLED.

ONE OF THE THEMES THAT I WAS INTRODUCED TO WAS THE "WORK BEFORE THE WORK." THIS IDEA RUNS THROUGH MUCH OF PARKER'S METHODOLOGY. IT IS DOING THE PREPARATORY WORK NECESSARY BEFORE THE REAL WORK CAN BEGIN. JANET'S INSTRUCTIONS CAME THROUGH IN THIS WAY.

"AS YOU KNOW, THE TITLE OF THIS RETREAT IS COURAGE TO LEAD, AND IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE RETREAT WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO FRAME QUESTIONS THAT INVITE THE SOUL, TO DISCOVER AGAIN THE DEEP CONNECTION BETWEEN SOUL AND ROLE, AND FOR YOU TO RENEW YOURSELF, YOUR VOCATION AND YOUR LEADERSHIP. WE WILL ALSO CONSIDER CONDITIONS FOR CREATING CIRCLES OF TRUST, AS DESCRIBED BY PARKER PALMER IN A HIDDEN WHOLENESS, INCLUDING CLEAR LIMITS, OPEN INVITATIONS, SKILLED LEADERSHIP, AND THE COMMON GROUND OF SEASONAL METAPHORS AND OTHER UNIFYING THEMES. I WOULD INVITE YOU TO READ OR REREAD A HIDDEN WHOLENESS BEFORE THE RETREAT IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY DONE SO.

I WOULD ASK YOU TO EACH SEND ME A BRIEF PERSONAL STATEMENT OF NO MORE THAN 1 PAGE. THIS INFORMATION WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL

BE USED BY THE FACILITATORS TO GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND TO TAILOR OUR FACILITATION ACCORDING TO THE GROUPS' NEEDS. IN YOUR STATEMENT, COULD YOU PLEASE ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING:

- 1. THE SETTING IN WHICH YOU CURRENTLY WORK*
- 2. WHY YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RETREAT AND HOW YOU HOPE TO BENEFIT*
- 3. A QUESTION THAT YOU ARE HOLDING REGARDING LEADERSHIP AND/OR VOCATION*

ON THE SATURDAY EVENING OF THE RETREAT WE WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CLEARNESS COMMITTEES. PARKER PALMER DESCRIBES CLEARNESS COMMITTEES IN CHAPTER VIII OF HIS BOOK A HIDDEN WHOLENESS, AND WE WILL SHARE MORE INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT THIS PROCESS DURING THE RETREAT.

IF YOU HAVE AN ISSUE OR DILEMMA THAT YOU'D LIKE TO WORK WITH, I INVITE YOU TO CONSIDER BEING A FOCUS PERSON FOR ONE OF OUR CLEARNESS COMMITTEES (WE CAN ACCOMMODATE FOUR FOCUS PERSONS). WE WILL INVITE VOLUNTEERS FOR FOCUS PERSONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE RETREAT, BUT I INVITE YOU TO BEGIN THINKING ABOUT THIS NOW. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR KNOW THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO E-MAIL ME.”

AS WELL AS THE READING THAT NEEDED TO BE DONE AND THE PERSONAL STATEMENT PREPARED, THE INSTRUCTIONS GAVE A CLEAR OUTLINE OF THE PURPOSE SO THAT IN BOTH THE RE-READING AND THE WRITING I WAS ABLE TO BE MORE FOCUSED. THIS PREPARATION MADE THE TRANSITION ON ARRIVAL INTO A RETREAT OF DEEP SOUL WORK MUCH EASIER TO ACHIEVE.

ALONG WITH THAT WAS THE FIRST OF THE “THIRD THINGS”. “THIRD THINGS” ARE A DEVICE USED TO DIRECT THE ATTENTION TO AN IMPORTANT TOPIC WITHOUT THE DIREST VOICE OF EITHER THE FACILITATOR OR THE PARTICIPANT. ONE OF THE SKILLS OF FACILITATION IS PROVIDING THE APPROPRIATE “THIRD THING”—A POEM, A STORY, A PICTURE OR WORK OF ART, OR PIECE OF MUSIC—THAT EMBODIES THE THEME BEING ADDRESSED.

IN THIS CASE IT WAS A BLESSING “FOR ONE WHO HOLDS POWER” FROM JOHN O'DONOHUE, 2008, *TO BLESS THE SPACE BETWEEN US*, DOUBLEDAY, NEW YORK.

FOR ME IT WAS A REMINDER THAT WHATEVER I MAY THINK, I DO HOLD A POSITION THAT HAS POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY WITH IT.

ONE OF THE IMPORTANT MOMENTS OF LEARNING FOR ME, AND FOR OTHERS OF US PRESENT, WAS HOW, IN THE NEED TO CREATE A SAFE PLACE FOR THE SOUL TO “APPEAR,” WE ACTUALLY HAD TO FORGO MANY OF THE SOCIAL NICETIES THAT WE USE TO FEEL COMFORTABLE. OUR INTRODUCTIONS WERE BRIEF AND FOCUSED AND DID NOT CONTAIN A LOT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY. IT MEANS THAT THERE ARE STILL PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE NOT MUCH MORE THAN A NAME – IN THE SENSE THAT I DO NOT KNOW THEIR WORK PLACE, THEIR FAMILY STRUCTURE, OR MUCH ELSE ALONG THOSE LINES – YET I KNOW THEM AT A SOUL LEVEL, HAVE GIVEN THEM MY TRUST AND RECEIVED THEIR TRUST,

AND HAVE JOURNEYED WITH THEM AS THEY EXPLORED THE INNER PLACES OF THEIR SOUL.

I WAS REMINDED OF THE WORK OF JOHN POWELL SJ, WHOSE REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNICATION SKILLS I HAVE USED IN THINGS LIKE PRE-MARRIAGE PREPARATION, AND RECENTLY ON A RETREAT FOR A CANCER SUPPORT GROUP.

POWELL IDENTIFIED FIVE PROGRESSIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION EACH INVOLVING INCREASING RISK/VULNERABILITY AS WELL AS THE POTENTIAL FOR INCREASING INTIMACY.³

1. CLICHES – TYPICAL, ROUTINE GREETINGS...IMPORTANT...CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS. WE EXPECT CLICHÉS AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF CONVERSATIONS. NO RISK
2. FACTS – INFO/STATS...SURFACE LEVEL...MAKES UP MOST OF OUR EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS. A MEANS OF GETTING TO KNOW ABOUT PEOPLE LITTLE RISK. OBJECTIVE
3. OPINIONS – INCLUDES OUR CONCERNS, PREFERENCES, EXPECTATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS. HERE SUBJECTIVE VIEWS ARE EXPRESSED AND THERE IS STRONG POTENTIAL FOR DISAGREEMENTS AND CONFLICT AT THIS LEVEL. IT IS THE TESTING GROUND FOR SAFETY. THE OPINION MAY BE VOICED TENTATIVELY OR DECISIVELY BUT THE RESPONSE WILL DETERMINE DIRECTION OF COMMUNICATION. A DECISION WILL BE MADE QUICKLY WHETHER TO RETREAT TO THE SAFETY OF THE EARLIER LEVEL OR RISK MOVING TOWARDS INCREASED VULNERABILITY AND INTIMACY.
4. FEELINGS – TALKING AT A MORE EMOTIONAL LEVEL ABOUT HOPES, FEARS AND DREAMS. SOMETIMES WE HAVE IDEAS ABOUT WHAT TYPE OF EMOTIONS ARE OKAY TO SHARE
5. INTIMACY – A SENSE OF SHARED UNDERSTANDING THAT MAY TRANSCEND WORDS. PERHAPS THAT SENSE OF BEING TRULY KNOWN AND HEARD. THIS MAY BE JUST FOR A MOMENT BUT IT IS PROFOUNDLY HEALING. THERE MAY BE A SENSE OF SHARING THE SAME EMOTION AT THE SAME INTENSITY.

NORMALLY IN GROUP WORK I HAVE BEEN USED TO LEADING PEOPLE FROM THE SUPERFICIAL, PAST THE FACTS AND OPINIONS AND INTO THE AREA OF FEELING SO THAT THEY MIGHT BE OPEN TO MOMENTS OF INTIMACY. WHAT APPEARED TO HAPPEN WAS THAT ONCE TRUST WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE FIRST SESSION WE BYPASSED THE FOUR LEVELS AND FOR THE WEEKEND STAYED AT THE LEVEL OF INTIMACY OR SOUL TALK. IT MEANT THAT ALL THE NON-ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION ON WHICH WE HAVE COME TO RELY IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN OUR BOUNDARIES AND WALLS BECAME SUPERFLUOUS. EVEN IN THE BREAKS FOR MEALS AND REFRESHMENT, THE CHARACTER OF THE INTERACTIONS WAS MARKEDLY DIFFERENT FROM ANYTHING I HAVE EXPERIENCED.

ONE OF THE CLUES FOR UNDERSTANDING THIS DYNAMIC IS IN THE BOUNDARY MARKER – “SPEAK YOUR TRUTH INTO THE CIRCLE ALWAYS RESPECTING THE TRUTHS OF OTHERS.” EACH PERSON’S SPEAKING IS TREATED AS THEIR INNER TEACHER SPEAKING TO THEM, SO THAT VERY QUICKLY WE BEGIN TO LEARN FROM THAT, THAT WE CAN HEAR FROM THAT DEPTH WITHIN US. IN A SENSE

³ P. 50 ff. Powell, J. (1969). *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* Hong Kong: William Collins & Sons.

THE COMMUNAL DIALOGUE IS A SERIES OF REFLECTIVE MONOLOGUES WHICH USE THE WORDS AND FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS OF THE OTHERS IN WHOSE COMPANY WE ARE. THE THOUGHT THAT WE ARE ONLY RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN UTTERANCES AND SILENCES, AND NOT FOR WHAT OTHERS MAY OR MAY NOT SAY IS NOT NOVEL, YET IT IS RARELY THAT IT OPERATES INTENTIONALLY IN A GROUP.

A SECOND THEME THAT WOVE ITS WAY THROUGH THE WEEKEND WAS THE THEM OF THE SOUL AS INNER TEACHER ABLE TO ADDRESS US. EVEN THOUGH I HAVE BEEN ON A NUMBER OF “SPIRITUAL” RETREATS I HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED THE CONSTANT REFLECTION ON THE SOUL THAT WAS SPOKEN BY SUCH A DIVERSE GROUP OF PEOPLE, MANY OF WHOM WERE NOT DIRECTLY LINKED INTO ANY PARTICULAR FAITH TRADITION. PALMER IS QUITE CLEAR ABOUT THE NEED TO FOCUS ON THIS AS WE ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP.

“THE PROBLEM IS THAT PEOPLE RISE TO LEADERSHIP IN OUR SOCIETY BY A TENDENCY TOWARDS EXTROVERSION, WHICH MEANS A TENDENCY TO IGNORE WHAT IS GOING ON WITHIN THEMSELVES... I HAVE MET MANY LEADERS WHOSE CONFIDENCE IN THE EXTERNAL WORLD IS SO HIGH THAT THEY REGARD THE INNER LIFE AS ILLUSORY, AS A WASTE OF TIME, AS A MAGICAL FANTASY TRIP INTO A REGION THAT DOESN’T EVEN EXIST. BUT THE LINK BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY CALLS US TO RE-EXAMINE THAT DENIAL OF INNER LIFE.”⁴

THIS FOCUS ON THE SOUL AND SPIRITUALITY AS THE KEY TO LEADERSHIP WAS VERY POWERFUL. THE WHOLE IDEA OF RECONNECTING SOUL AND ROLE HAS A DEEP SENSE TO IT. JOHN FENNER WRITING ABOUT THE COURAGE TO LEAD RETREATS HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADING PUTS IT STARKLY.

“LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES ARE CALLED UPON TO NEGOTIATE MULTIPLE ROLES: SPIRITUAL GUIDE, SCHOLAR, COUNSELLOR, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, MANAGER, CONFIDANT, TEACHER, FRIEND, AND, FOR MANY, PARTNER, SPOUSE AND PARENT. THESE ROLES CARRY CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS THAT—INTERWOVEN WITH THE MYTHOLOGY AROUND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A “RELIGIOUS LEADER”—CREATE A VARIETY OF MALADIES THAT ARE FAR TOO COMMON IN MINISTRY... LEADERSHIP, SERVICE, AND MINISTRY, RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD, REQUIRE MORE THAN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL. LEADERS MUST LEARN TO LISTEN TO THEIR “INNER TEACHER” IN A COMMUNITY OF DISCERNMENT AND FIND THE COURAGE NECESSARY TO FOLLOW THE GUIDANCE THEY RECEIVE.”⁵

A THIRD THEME WHICH RESONATES VERY STRONGLY IS THAT OF THE TRAGIC GAP. ONCE AGAIN THIS IS NOT A UNIQUE INSIGHT, BUT THE WAY IT IS USED HELPS THE PARTICIPANT TO UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES IN A DIFFERENT WAY. THE TRAGIC GAP IS *THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT IS AND WHAT COULD AND SHOULD BE*⁶ HAVING SEEN AN ALTERNATIVE REALITY AND EXPERIENCED IT WE

⁴ P.3. Palmer, P. J. (2000). Leading from Within. In *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

⁵ P.17. Fenner, J. (2009). The Courage to Lead: A Retreat Program for Clergy and Congregational Leaders. *Weavings*, XXIV, 2.

⁶ P.13. Palmer, P. J. (2009). The Broken-Open Heart: Living with Faith and Hope in the Tragic Gap. *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*, XXIV, 2.

THEN HAVE A CHOICE. ONE IS TO HOLD THE TENSION BETWEEN REALITY AND POSSIBILITY IN A LIFE-GIVING WAY, STANDING IN THE GAP AND WITNESSING WITH MY OWN LIFE, AND CALLING MYSELF AND MY PART OF THE WORLD TOWARDS SOMETHING BETTER. THE OTHER IS TO RESOLVE THE TENSION BY COLLAPSING INTO ONE POLE OR THE OTHER, USING THE FLIGHT/FIGHT RESPONSE. COLLAPSING INTO THE REALITY OF WHAT IS LEADS TO CORROSIVE CYNICISM, WHILE COLLAPSING INTO PURE POSSIBILITY ALLOWS US TO FLOAT INTO IRRELEVANT IDEALISM. THE NET EFFECT IS TO TAKE US OUT OF THE GAP, OUT OF THE ACTION, AND OUT OF THOSE PLACES WHERE WE MIGHT MAKE A LIFE-GIVING CONTRIBUTION BY HOLDING ONTO THE TENSION.

AS A PREACHER, I RESONATED WITH THIS IMAGE VERY STRONGLY. NEARLY ALL THAT I SAY IS ADDRESSING THE CONGREGATION AND CHURCH MEMBERS SO THEY MAY UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING TO HOLD THE TENSION. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY ARE VERY CLEAR. IF THE WHOLE BODY DOESN'T EMBRACE THIS IN ITS OWN LIFE THEN IT WILL COLLAPSE INTO WHAT SCOTT PECK CALLS "PSEUDO-COMMUNITY."⁷

PARKER AGAIN:

"WE DON'T LEARN TO LOVE FROM BEING TALKED AT BUT FROM BEING AROUND LOVE IN ACTION. WE DON'T LEARN TO HOLD TENSION IN WAYS THAT OPEN THE HEART BY READING ESSAYS BUT BY BEING AROUND OTHERS WHO KEEP LEARNING HOW TO DO IT AND INVITE US TO TRY IT FOR OURSELVES."⁸

ONE OF THE WAYS A COMMUNITY CAN JUDGE WHETHER IT IS TRYING TO HOLD THE TENSION IS IN THE PROCESSES IT USES TO MAKE DECISIONS. DOES IT HURRY THROUGH DECISIONS HOPING TO RESOLVE TENSION AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE? OR CAN IT SIT WITH THE DIFFERENCES UNTIL ALL FEEL HEARD AND ABLE TO MOVE FORWARD?

THE FOURTH THEME THAT I WANT TO HIGHLIGHT IS THE IDEA OF BEING ALONE TOGETHER. A CIRCLE OF TRUST IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF COMMUNITY. ALTHOUGH I SENSED IT BEFOREHAND IT DIDN'T REALLY COME HOME TO ME UNTIL WE BEGAN TO WORK FIRST IN THE WIDER CIRCLE, THEN IN PAIRS AND TRIADS, AND LASTLY IN THE CLEARNESS COMMITTEE ITSELF. THERE IS NO OTHER AGENDA IN THE GATHERING THAN THE COMING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT EACH OTHERS INNER JOURNEY, TO MAKE EACH SOUL FEEL SAFE ENOUGH TO SHOW UP AND SPEAK ITS TRUTH, TO HELP EACH PERSON LISTEN TO THEIR INNER TEACHER. PALMER QUOTES BONHOEFFER FROM HIS EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMMUNITY AT FINKENWALDE "*LET HIM WHO CANNOT BE ALONE BEWARE OF COMMUNITY. LET HIM WHO IS NOT IN COMMUNITY BEWARE OF BEING ALONE.*"⁹ WHAT THIS WARNING MEANS IN THIS CONTEXT IS THAT THE ONE WHO IS ALONE CAN EASILY GET LOST IN THEIR OWN INNER LABYRINTH AND EXCLUDE THE COMMUNITY AND WORLD AROUND THEM. CONVERSELY, IN OUR EAGERNESS TO LEARN FROM OTHERS IT IS EASY TO GET LOST IN THE CONFUSION OF THE CROWD. BOTH ARE IMPORTANT, AS IMPORTANT TO OUR

⁷ P.86 ff. Peck, M. S. (1990). *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*. London: Arrow Books Ltd.

⁸ P.14. Palmer (2009) *The Broken-Open Heart*

⁹ P.55. Palmer (2004) *A Hidden Wholeness*

TOTAL LIVING AS IS BREATHING IN AND BREATHING OUT. YOU CAN'T CHOOSE TO "DO" ONLY ONE OF THOSE OPTIONS.

PART OF THE "WORK BEFORE THE WORK" IN BEGINNING THE RETREAT ADDRESSED THIS VERY QUESTION. ONE OF THE THINGS WE THINK WE CAN DO WHEN IN A TIME OF SOLITUDE IS TO BE TRULY ALONE. THERE ARE TIMES WE SUCCEED BUT THERE ARE ALSO OTHERS WHERE WE BRING OTHERS WITH US, HAVE INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS WITH THEM. THE VERY VISIBLE SABBATH BOX PULLED THIS TOGETHER BY OFFERING A PLACE TO PARK THOSE INTERIOR CONVERSATIONS WHILE WE ATTENDED TO BEING PRESENT, FIRST TO OURSELVES AND THEN EQUALLY FOR THE CIRCLE ITSELF. SOLITUDE IN THIS CONTEXT MEANS NEVER LIVING APART FROM ONE'S SELF AND COMMUNITY MEANS NEVER LOSING THE AWARENESS THAT WE ARE CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER. IT IS NOT ABOUT THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF THE OTHER, BUT ABOUT BEING OPEN TO THE REALITY OF RELATIONSHIP.

ONE OF THE ASPECTS OF WHAT I EXPLORED IN THIS SETTING WAS MY OWN PERCEPTION OF HOW THE CHURCH MIGHT BE SUCH A PLACE. COMMENTS MADE OVER THE TIME CLEARLY SHOWED THAT FOR SOME THE CHURCH WAS NOT A SAFE PLACE FOR THE SOUL TO APPEAR, YET AS I UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, THE CHURCH ALSO HAS EVERYTHING WITHIN IT THAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE TENDING, THE CARE AND NURTURE OF THE SOUL. PALMER ECHOES THAT WHEN HE SAYS THAT "...[CHRISTIAN] COMMUNITIES ARE THE CONTEXT IN WHICH SOME OF THIS LEARNING COULD AND SHOULD BE HAPPENING." THERE'S "A GOOD CASE THAT THE CORE PURPOSE OF CONGREGATIONS IS TO ENGAGE IN THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF ITS MEMBERS."¹⁰

"CONGREGATIONS MUST BEGIN BY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT WE ARE ALREADY A COMPANY OF STRANGERS, BUT THAT WE ARE AFRAID TO KNOW EACH OTHER. THE HOMOGENEOUS, WHITE MIDDLE-CLASS CONGREGATION IS A MYTH. CONGREGATIONS ONLY PRETEND TO BE HOMOGENEOUS IN ORDER TO AVOID CONFLICT AND CHALLENGE. IF YOU LOOK BELOW THE SURFACE, THINGS ARE ALWAYS HAPPENING THAT MAKE PEOPLE FEEL LIKE OUTSIDERS. WE HAVE DIFFERENCES OF ATTITUDE AND OPINION ON EVERY MAJOR ISSUE. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER WE ARE WILLING TO FIND COMFORT AND COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS CHALLENGE, IN THOSE DIFFERENCES. ONLY IF WE CAN DO THAT WILL STRANGERS OF ANOTHER SORT HAVE ANY INTEREST IN JOINING OUR CHURCHES."¹¹

THIS LATTER REFLECTION FROM AN INTERVIEW BACK IN 1995 HAS A PRESENT ECHO IN WHAT I EXPERIENCED RECENTLY AT THE MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT REVIEW TRAINING IN WHICH THE SYSTEMS APPROACH APPLIED TO CONGREGATIONAL LIFE WAS USED AS A TOOL TO ASSIST THE REVIEW PROCESS. THE LEADER IS THE ONE WITH THE ROLE OF ASSISTING WITH THE HELPFUL RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT WITHIN THE CONGREGATION. IN ORDER TO DO THAT THE LEADER HAS TO BE WHAT IS DESCRIBED AS A "LESS ANXIOUS PRESENCE" AND CLEARLY "SELF DIFFERENTIATED." THIS SELF DIFFERENTIATION REQUIRES ONE TO BE AWARE OF THEIR OWN LEVEL OF REACTIVITY, AN ABILITY

¹⁰ (1995). Action and insight: an interview with Parker Palmer. *The Christian Century*.

¹¹ *ibid*

TO REDUCE THEIR OWN LEVEL OF REACTIVITY, AN ABILITY TO SEPARATE INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING AND AN ABILITY TO ACT ON THE BASIS OF ONES PRINCIPLED BELIEFS AND GOALS.

FROM MY EXPERIENCE OF THE COURAGE TO LEAD RETREAT I WOULD SAY THAT THIS PROVIDES A SUITABLE VEHICLE TO HELP CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS DEVELOP THESE ABILITIES. THE PROCESS IS NOT ABOUT "SKILL DEVELOPMENT" AS SUCH. RATHER IT IS ABOUT GETTING IN TUNE WITH YOURSELF TRULY AND LEARNING OUT OF THAT WHOLENESS.

AGAIN TO LIVE
UNIQUE



"Courage to Lead for Professionals under Siege."

WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH THE CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SOUL HELD FOR TWO HOURS WHILE YOU WAITED UPON YOUR INNER TEACHER?

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME A SMALL GROUP OF CARING ADULTS HELD YOU AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR ATTENTION FOR TWO HOURS WITH NOTHING ON THEIR MINDS EXCEPT CREATING AND PROTECTING AS SPACE WHERE YOU COULD HEAR YOUR SOUL SPEAK?¹²

THE EXPERIENCE OF FINDING A CHANCE TO ANSWER THOSE QUESTIONS CAME AS I ATTENDED A COURAGE TO LEAD RETREAT AT THE WARRAMBUI RETREAT CENTRE NEAR CANBERRA LED BY JANET SMITH, PHD, M.ED, WHO LECTURES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION AND IS DEPUTY HEAD OF SCHOOL IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA, AND THE ONLY TRAINED FACILITATOR OF THESE RETREATS OUTSIDE OF NORTH AMERICA.

THESE HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FROM THE WORK OF PALMER PARKER AND MORE RECENTLY THE CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL, AND THE NETWORK THAT HAS DEVELOPED AROUND THE MOVEMENT. PARKER PALMER IS A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER AND EDUCATOR WHO DEVELOPED THIS WORK OUT OF A CONCERN FOR EDUCATORS AND TEACHERS WHO WERE STRUGGLING WITH WHO THEY WERE AND HOW THEY WERE WORKING. AFTER A NUMBER OF YEARS OF RUNNING COURAGE TO TEACH RETREATS FOR TEACHERS, CLERGY, SOCIAL SERVICE SECTOR WORKERS, MEDICAL AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND PEOPLE IN THE "NOT FOR PROFIT" SECTOR ASKED HIM TO ADAPT IT TO THEIR NEEDS. THIS LEAD TO THE CREATION OF THE COURAGE TO LEAD SERIES OF RETREATS FOR CROSS-PROFESSIONAL GROUPS.

CTL RETREATS PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LEADERS TO RENEW THEMSELVES AND TO CULTIVATE THEIR LEADERSHIP. THESE RETREATS PROVIDE SPACE AND QUIET SO THAT PEOPLE CAN BEGIN TO HEAR THEIR INNER VOICE, AND ARE COMMITTED TO CREATING OPEN, DISCIPLINED SPACES, WHERE PARTICIPANTS CAN DISCOVER AGAIN THE DEEP CONNECTION BETWEEN ROLE AND SOUL. THROUGH A VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES, PARTICIPANTS ARE INVITED TO LISTEN FOR THEIR OWN INNER WISDOM, TO CREATE A COMMUNITY OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND TO RECONNECT PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY.

I WANT TO INSERT A WORD ABOUT LANGUAGE HERE. IN TWO CRITIQUES OF THE WORK, BOTH HAVE POINTED OUT THE INHERENT DIFFICULTIES OF USING LANGUAGE LIKE RETREAT AND SOUL AND INNER TEACHER IN A SECULAR ENVIRONMENT.

“INTERVIEWEES REPORTED CHALLENGES IN FINDING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE AND NAME THE

¹² P.147 PALMER, P. J. (2004). *A HIDDEN WHOLENESS: THE JOURNEY TOWARDS AN UNDIVIDED LIFE*. SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY-BASS.

'WORK' THAT TAKES PLACE IN COT RETREATS. SEVERAL INTERVIEWEES ALSO COMMENTED ON DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF THE WORD 'RETREAT' TO DESCRIBE A TYPE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AS THE WORD 'RETREAT' HAS PARTICULAR CONNOTATIONS AND MAY NOT BE REGARDED BY SOME AS LEGITIMATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT."¹³

"...THERE WILL BE THOSE WHO ARE DEEPLY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH PARKER J. PALMER'S EMBRACING OF THE SPIRITUAL AND WITH HIS DISMISSAL OF WHAT HE CALLS 'OBJECTIVISM'. SUBSTANTIAL ELEMENTS OF HIS THINKING WILL NOT RESONATE WITH READERS WHO DOUBT THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. WHILE THERE ARE SOME WAYS AROUND THIS - FOR EXAMPLE, VIEWING CONNECTEDNESS AS BOTH A GENETIC INHERITANCE AND SOMETHING THAT IS LEARNED, OR ACCEPTING THE CENTRALITY OF THE CHARACTER AND INTEGRITY OF THE EDUCATOR (BUT WITHOUT A FULLY HOLISTIC APPRECIATION OF WHAT THESE MIGHT ENTAIL) - THE WHOLE PROJECT IS RATHER EMPTY WITHOUT FAITH."¹⁴

AS A MINISTER I HAVE ALSO FOUND THIS TO BE AN ISSUE AS I TRY TO TALK ABOUT WHAT I EXPERIENCED TO OTHERS WHO DON'T SHARE MY WORLDVIEW. SOME OF THE IMAGES PARKER USES TO DRAW US INTO THE "WORK" MAY HELP. HE TALKS ABOUT A CULTURE OF "DISCONNECTION" AND THE WAY WE FOCUS ON TECHNIQUE AND POWER TO GET THINGS DONE.

"BUT FOR ALL THE POWER IT HAS GIVEN US IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, EITHER-OR THINKING HAS ALSO GIVEN US A FRAGMENTED SENSE OF REALITY THAT DESTROYS THE WHOLENESS AND WONDER OF LIFE. OUR PROBLEM IS COMPOUNDED BY THE FACT THAT THIS MODE OF KNOWING HAS BECOME NORMATIVE IN NEARLY EVERY AREA, EVEN THOUGH IT MISLEADS AND BETRAYS US WHEN APPLIED TO THE PERENNIAL PROBLEMS OF BEING HUMAN THAT LIE BEYOND THE REACH OF LOGIC"¹⁵

INSTEAD HE ASKS US TO "ASKS US TO LOOK BEYOND KNOWLEDGE INSPIRED EITHER PURELY BY CURIOSITY OR BY A

¹³ SMITH, J. (2007). EVALUATION OF *CIRCLE OF TRUST* RETREATS. SUMMARY REPORT.

[HTTP://COURAGERENEWAL.ORG/RESOURCES/EVALUATION](http://courage Renewal.org/resources/evaluation).

¹⁴ P.II. SMITH, M. K. (2005) 'PARKER J. PALMER: COMMUNITY, KNOWING AND SPIRITUALITY IN EDUCATION', *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INFORMAL EDUCATION*, WWW.INFED.ORG/THINKERS/PALMER.HTM. LAST UPDATE: JUNE 18, 2009.

¹⁵ CHARLES, MICHAEL T. WHERE ARE WE GOING AS WE LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND? LA TECHNIQUE AND POSTMAN, PAPERT, AND PALMER — PART THREE. INTERFACE_ THE JOURNAL FOR EDUCATION, COMMUNITY, AND VALUES [MAY-JUNE 2007](#) VOLUME 7, ISSUE 3

DESIRE TO CONTROL. THE FIRST, HE SUGGESTS, 'CORRESPONDS TO PURE SPECULATIVE KNOWLEDGE, TO KNOWLEDGE AS AN END IN ITSELF'. THE SECOND 'CORRESPONDS TO APPLIED SCIENCE, TO KNOWLEDGE AS A MEANS TO PRACTICAL ENDS.' HE ARGUES THAT ANOTHER KIND OF KNOWLEDGE IS OPEN TO US, 'ONE THAT BEGINS IN A DIFFERENT PASSION AND IS DRAWN TO OTHER ENDS.' THIS KNOWLEDGE ORIGINATES IN COMPASSION OR LOVE."¹⁶

THIS TECHNIQUE DRIVEN APPROACH IS ECHOED IN *FINDING THE STILL POINT* BY TOM HARPUR WHO REFLECTS UPON A CURRENT WESTERN PRACTICE OF MANY SELF-HELP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES WHICH CHERRY PICK APPARENTLY SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES FROM MANY OF THE ANCIENT SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS AS A WAY OF TRYING TO RELIEVE THE STRESS OF MODERN LIVING. "DIVORCED FROM THEIR SPIRITUAL UNDERPINNINGS AND/OR RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING, SUCH TECHNIQUES, APPLIED TO STRESS, LACK A POTENCY WHICH THEY WERE ORIGINALLY DESIGNED TO HAVE AND MEANT TO IMPART."¹⁷

A COURAGE TO LEAD RETREAT AIMS TO RENEW THE HEART, MIND AND SPIRIT. IT DOES THIS THROUGH THE EXPLORATION OF THE INNER LANDSCAPE OF ONE'S LIFE. IT DOES THIS BY HELPING TO RECONNECT TO ONE'S IDENTITY AND INTEGRITY, AND IN THE PROCESS IDENTIFYING AND HONOURING GIFTS AND STRENGTHS, WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THE LIMITS WE ARE LIVING AND WORKING IN. THE RETREAT FORMAT CREATES A CONTEXT FOR CAREFUL LISTENING AND DEEP CONNECTION THAT ALSO HONOURS DIVERSITY IN PERSON AND PROFESSION AND HELPS PEOPLE THEN MOVE OUT TO CREATE SAFE SPACES AND TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS IN THEIR WORKPLACES, FAMILIES, AND WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

HOW WELL THESE GOALS WERE MET IN THE CROSS-PROFESSIONAL COURAGE TO LEAD® RETREATS WAS THE FOCUS OF A STUDY BY JANET IN 2007. THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION EXPRESSED IN THE RETREATS WAS FOUND TO BE VERY HIGH WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS REPORTING THAT THE RETREATS MOSTLY (15%, FULLY (8%) OR EXCEEDED (77%) THEIR EXPECTATIONS.¹⁸ SHE FOUND THE MAJORITY OF PARTICIPANTS REPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW NETWORKS OF SUPPORT WITH OTHER LEADERS, WHICH HELPED COUNTERACT THE PREVAILING CULTURE OF OVERWORK AND ISOLATION THEY WERE EXPERIENCING IN THEIR WORK SETTINGS; REVITALIZED LEADERSHIP THAT ENABLED THEM TO USE UNTAPPED POTENTIALS, PASSIONS, AND TALENTS; AND AN INCREASED CAPACITY TO CULTIVATE THE KIND OF TRUSTWORTHY RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRED TO BE AN EFFECTIVE LEADER. CLEARLY THE APPROACH VIA "SOUL-TALK" GAVE THIS WIDE MIX OF PROFESSIONALS THE CHANCE TO LOOK AT THEMSELVES, AND TO ACCEPT THAT THEY HAD INNER RESOURCES THEY COULD DRAW ON.

PARKER AND THE CENTER WORK ON THE PREMISE THAT "[T]HE BEST LEADERS WORK FROM A PLACE OF INTEGRITY IN THEMSELVES, FROM THEIR HEARTS. IF THEY DON'T, THEY CAN'T INSPIRE TRUSTFUL RELATIONSHIPS. IN THE ABSENCE

¹⁶ P.6. SMITH, M. K. (2005)

¹⁷ P.11F HARPUR, T. (2005). *FINDING THE STILL POINT: A SPIRITUAL RESPONSE TO STRESS*. KELOWNA: NORTHSTONE PUBLISHING.

¹⁸ P.17 SMITH, J. (2007).

OF TRUST, ORGANIZATIONS FALL APART.¹⁹ CERTAINLY MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATIONS I AM INVOLVED WITH AND WITH THE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AND TRUSTS I BELONG TO THERE IS A REAL SENSE OF NEED FOR LEADERS WHO HAVE INTEGRITY, AND FOR THE LEADERS THEMSELVES TO BE ABLE TO WORK IN AN INTEGRATED WAY, LIVING OUT OF THEIR FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND VALUES.

SO WHAT WAS MY EXPERIENCE AND HOW DID THIS MEASURE UP FOR ME. THOSE OF YOU FAMILIAR WITH JOHN POWELL'S FIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION FOR INTERPERSONAL ENCOUNTER²⁰ WILL BE AWARE OF HOW AS COUNSELLORS WE WORK OUR WAY DOWN, ESTABLISHING TRUST AND WORK PRIMARILY AT THE LEVEL OF FEELINGS AND GUT LEVEL, AND THAT THE WAY TO GET THERE IS TO GENTLY MOVE DOWN FROM THE CLICHÉ AND FACT LEVELS, AND PAST THE LEVEL OF IDEAS AND JUDGEMENTS, SO THAT BY GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE FEELING LEVEL THE CLIENT CAN BEGIN THEIR WORK.

THROUGH THE USE OF SETTING, THE CAREFUL ESTABLISHMENT OF BOUNDARY MARKERS, AND CLEAR INSTRUCTION OF WHO YOU ARE REALLY SPEAKING TO, I DISCOVERED VERY RAPIDLY THAT FOR MOST OF THE WEEKEND I WAS OPERATING AT THE DEEPEST OF POWELL'S LEVELS, THAT OF PEAK COMMUNICATION, AND THAT WE HAD DIVED IN AS IT WERE, A COMPANY OF STRANGERS WHO TRUSTED THEMSELVES TO THE PROCESS. ONE CLEAR POINTER TO THE STRENGTH OF THAT PROCESS WAS THAT AS ONE OF THREE KIWIS IN A ROOMFUL OF AUSTRALIANS, NONE OF THE USUAL "BANTER" OCCURRED AT ANY STAGE THAT I AM AWARE OF. A SECOND INDICATOR IS THAT WHILE I HAVE CLEAR IMAGES AND NAMES OF EVERYONE, I WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO TALK ABOUT THEIR WORK SETTINGS, THEIR FAMILIES, OR EVEN WHICH PART OF AUSTRALIA THEY HAILED FROM. THOSE ELEMENTS WEREN'T NECESSARY FOR THE WORK WE WERE UNDERTAKING.

THROUGH THE USE OF METAPHOR, POETRY, PICTURE WE WERE INVITED TO REFLECT ON HOW THESE "THIRD THINGS" INTERSECTED WITH OUR LIVES AT THE MOMENT. THEN THE INVITATION WAS TO SPEAK THAT OUT INTO THE CIRCLE. NONE OF THOSE VOICES WERE CHALLENGED, OR DISPUTED OR DISCUSSED. IF SOMEONE ELSE HAD A DIFFERENT RESPONSE (INNER TRUTH) TO YOU THAT WAS FINE, BECAUSE THEY WERE COMING FROM A DIFFERENT PLACE THAN YOU. THE INVITATION WAS THERE ALSO TO LISTEN TO YOUR INNER RESPONSE TO THE VOICES OF THE OTHERS. WHAT WAS IT THAT MADE YOU WANT TO ARGUE THE TOSS, THAT MADE YOU CLENCH? WE WERE ENCOURAGED TO JOURNAL AS WE WENT THROUGH THE WEEKEND, NOT AS REPORTAGE ON THE PROCEEDINGS, BUT ON THE WORDS THAT AROSE FROM WITHIN, THE RESPONSES THAT CAME.

A THIRD ASPECT THAT A NUMBER OF US (MAINLY CLERGY AND COUNSELLORS) FOUND HARD TO ADJUST TO, BUT ONCE MASTERED, TURNED THE WEEKEND INTO A MUCH RICHER EXPERIENCE THAN I HAD IMAGINED WAS THE NO FIXING RULE. THE JOB WAS TO STAY PRESENT TO EACH OTHER WITHOUT WAVERING,

¹⁹ 'RITTENHOUSE, L. J. (2001). 'LEADERSHIP AND THE INNER JOURNEY: AN INTERVIEW WITH PARKER PALMER'. *LEADER TO LEADER, FALL*.

²⁰ PP 54-62. POWELL, J. (1969). *WHY AM I AFRAID TO TELL YOU WHO I AM?* HONG KONG: WILLIAM COLLINS & SONS.

AND TO STIFLE ANY IMPULSE TO FIX EACH OTHER UP. THE TASK WAS TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER AS WE EACH WENT INTO OURSELVES WHERE WE NEEDED TO GO. IT TREATS THE SOUL AS AN END IN ITSELF AND RECOGNISES THAT THE SOUL DOESN'T NEED FIXING.

THE CENTRE OF THE RETREAT WAS WHAT ARE CALLED CLEARNESS COMMITTEES. THESE HAVE A LONG HISTORY BEING DRAWN FROM THE QUAKER DISCIPLINE. THE HEART OF THESE IS THE WRESTLING BY A FOCUS PERSON WITH AN ISSUE THAT THEY HAVE. THEY SIT WITH FOUR TO SIX OTHERS AND AT FIRST SPEND 10-15 MINUTES OUTLINING THE ISSUE WITH WHATEVER OTHER INFORMATION IS THOUGH NECESSARY. THEN FOR THE NEXT HOUR AND A HALF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS ASK OPEN, HONEST QUESTIONS AT A GENTLE PACE WHICH THE FOCUS PERSON THEN ANSWERS, USUALLY OUT LOUD, WITH THE USUAL RULE ABOUT PASSING. HERE ALSO THE NO FIXING RULE IS IMPORTANT AS QUESTIONS SHOULDN'T BE UNNECESSARILY PROBING OR CHALLENGING, NOR IF TEARS OR LAUGHTER COME SHOULD THE COMMITTEE COMFORT OR JOIN IN. THEN THERE IS A TIME OF MIRRORING BACK A QUESTION AND ANSWER VERBATIM, A QUOTE OF TWO OR THREE ANSWERS INVITING THE FOCUS PERSON TO LOOK AT THEM IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER, OR A DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSON'S BODY LANGUAGE.²¹

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY OF BEING ONE OF THE FOCUS PERSONS. IN THE PROCESS I FOUND THAT THE QUESTION I CAME WITH WASN'T THE QUESTION I NEEDED. THE POINT OF ENLIGHTENMENT FOR ME WAS IN THE MIRRORING WHERE THERE WAS ONE DESCRIPTION OF MY BODY'S RESPONSE TO A QUESTION WHICH, WHEN I LOOKED AT THE ANSWERS I WAS GIVING AT THE TIME, SHOWED MUCH MORE WHAT MY INNER SELF WAS TRYING TO GET THROUGH TO ME THAN WHAT THE WORDS BEING UTTERED REPRESENTED.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PROCESS.

WE WERE ALL ENCOURAGED TO AVOID EYE CONTACT. IT GOES AGAINST EVERYTHING I HAVE LEARNED IN MY COUNSELLING PRACTISE OVER THE YEARS. THIS WAS SO THAT WE WERE NOT DISTRACTED BY THE NEED TO READ RESPONSES FROM THE OTHER MEMBERS, OR THE FOCUS PERSONS. THE GOAL IS COMMUNICATING WITH ONE'S TRUE SELF AND NOT WITH OTHER PEOPLE SO THAT NON-VERBAL SIGNALS FROM SOMEONE ELSE ARE IRRELEVANT. THIS HELD TRUE FOR THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS ALSO, AS IN THE PROCESS OF ASKING THEIR QUESTIONS THEY WERE LISTENING ALSO TO THEIR OWN INNER TEACHER.

A REFLECTION FROM A NARRATIVE THERAPIST, WHICH RESONATED WITH ME, WAS THAT AS A THERAPIST/COUNSELLOR PART OF THE TASK IS TO HOLD THE THREADS OF THE STORY AND TO LISTEN ANALYTICALLY AND HELP THE CLIENT IN THE PROCESS. THIS PROCESS WAS ONE OF ENGAGED LISTENING WHERE IN LISTENING TO THE PERSON, YOUR TASK IS TO LOOK AFTER YOUR OWN THREADS WHILE THE FOCUS PERSON LOOKS AFTER THEIRS. IT ECHOED THE NO FIXING RULE WHICH WAS TREMENDOUSLY FREEING FOR ME. TRUSTING THAT THE QUESTIONS BEING OFFERED WEREN'T TRYING TO LEAD ME ANYWHERE IN

²¹ THESE ARE DESCRIBED MORE CLEARLY IN CHAP 8 OF *A HIDDEN WHOLENESS*

PARTICULAR MEANT THAT I COULD ATTEND TO MY RESPONSES MUCH MORE DEEPLY.

THE GREATEST PROTECTION THAT IS OFFERED BY THIS PROCESS COMES UNDER THE RULE OF DOUBLE CONFIDENTIALITY. THIS IS SIMPLY THE CONDITION THAT NOT ONLY WHAT IS SAID IN THE COMMITTEE STAYING THERE, IT IS ALSO A COMMITMENT BY THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO NOT TALK ABOUT IT WITH THE FOCUS PERSON UNLESS THEY THEMSELVES WANT TO REFLECT ON IT. AS A MARK OF THAT ALL THE NOTES AND JOTTINGS TAKEN BY THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ARE GIVEN TO THE FOCUS PERSON AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING. PARKER DESCRIBES THIS AS "...A GREAT GIFT: A DETAILED RECORD OF WHAT HIS OR HER SOUL WAS SAYING WHEN IT FELT SAFE ENOUGH TO TELL THE TRUTH."²²

THERE WERE OTHER EXERCISES ALONE, IN PAIRS AND TRIADS AS WELL AS WITH THE WHOLE GROUP, BUT THAT I THINK GIVES A TASTE OF WHAT I EXPERIENCED. PERHAPS TO MENTION TOO, THAT I DIDN'T HAVE A SENSE OF THE MONDAY MORNING POST-RETREAT/WORKSHOP LETDOWN. THIS IS ACKNOWLEDGED AS A REAL PROBLEM AND THE FACILITATORS WORK HARD TO ENSURE THAT WE GO OUT ON AN EVEN KEEL AS IT WERE. THEY RECOGNISE THAT HAVING ALLOWED THE SOUL TO COME INTO THE OPEN AS IT WERE, TO LEAVE IT THERE WHEN WE RE-ENTER OUR EVERYDAY WORKING WORLD LEAVES IT VULNERABLE. YET AT THE SAME TIME WE RECOGNISE THAT BY BEING IN TOUCH WITH OUR SOULS IN THIS SETTING WE HAVE IN SOME WAY ALTERED THE WAY WE WILL BE IN THE FUTURE, THAT WE WILL LOOK FOR THE LIFE-GIVING WAYS TO WORK AND LIVE, THAT WE ARE A PART OF CO-CREATING THE WORLD WE ARE IN SO WE NO LONGER NEED TO BE VICTIMS OF IT. I FELT MUCH MORE GROUNDED IN MYSELF AND MORE AT HOME IN THE WORLD.

THE APPLICATION OF THIS WORK IS BOTH IMMEDIATE AND OUT INTO THE FUTURE. IN THE GROUPS WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADING, AND IN OUR WORK SETTINGS, I SEE DEVELOPING THE TWO SKILLS OF ASKING OPEN, HONEST QUESTIONS AND REFLECTIVE LISTENING AS HAVING IMMEDIATE APPLICATION. IT INVITES OUR GROUP MEMBERS AND FELLOW WORKERS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF HOW WE WORK TOGETHER IN RELATIONSHIP. FOR OURSELVES AS PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN A HOSTILE AND SUSPICIOUS WORLD, IT OFFERS A PATH OF REFRESHMENT AND RENEWAL SO THAT RATHER THAN DEVELOPING YET MORE SKILLS, WE LEARN TO DEVELOP OUR INNER RESOURCES. I AGREE WITH JANET SMITH WHEN SHE CONCLUDES HER PARAGRAPH ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE WITH

"COT RETREATS PROVIDE INDIVIDUALS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY AND SUPPORT TO RECLAIM THEIR PROFESSIONAL HEARTS, AND TO BE EMPOWERED TO 'GO PUBLIC' WITH THEIR DESIRE TO RECLAIM VOCATIONAL VITALITY AND "HEART" IN THEIR WORK AND PROFESSIONS."²³

²² P. 145 PALMER, P. J. (2004).

²³ P.11 SMITH, J. (2007).

THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT DOING HOPE TOGETHER, THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNSELLORS, HAMILTON 17–20 SEPTEMBER 2009.

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Trust and Leadership: A literature review.

Leadership writings tend not to focus on this yet I believe it is the ground on which all else will stand or fall.

An overview of a group of books on leadership and the church that I have gathered together shows that many of them have an interesting relationship with the concept of “trust.” In their indexes only a small number of them had references to the word, yet as I am learning “trust” is at the very heart of what we do as church leaders.

A brief summary of those treating the topic.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge*

This is a series of eight essays by different authors.

In *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*, Kouzes and Posner posit five practices that good leaders should follow: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart. Their discussion on trust enters as part of their reflection on enabling others in a subsection called Fostering Collaboration. Collaboration, they say, is the master skill that enables all else to function effectively, so leaders “*foster collaboration by promoting collaborative goals and building trust.*” They see trust at the very heart of cooperation. The skills needed to create a climate of trust include setting and example, active listening, giving people freedom to innovate, and nurturing openness, involvement, personal satisfaction, and high levels of commitment to excellence. They also demonstrate an openness to influence, which in turn breeds openness to the leader’s influence.²⁴

Nancy Ortberg writes about The Need to Trust in her essay. Her focus is on how trust operates within the context of a team. One again it is stated that you have to lay a foundation of trust before people do their best, and to learn to put the same trust in other people that we put in ourselves. Trust is a commodity that has to be earned.²⁵

She comes back to this a bit later in talking about a servant heart. Contrasting this with a leader that expects obedience which breeds cynicism and lack of trust, forces which weaken the goal, the team and the organisation. The values that build the right environment are those of integrity, authenticity, joy and dignity of work.²⁶ I find it curious that the congregation is here being described as an organisation, which to me has overtones of the business model.

This is also true in Kouzes and Posner’s piece where the church is clearly a business in which the leader comes in from outside and brings a vision to be shared and who creates the environment for that to happen.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. *Credibility: how leaders gain it and lose it, why people demand it.*

They come to the theme in the same way in their book *Credibility*, and have an extended section called Engendering Trust where once again the theme is on particular actions of the leader figure.

1. Is my behaviour predictable or not?

²⁴ P. 28 KOUZES, J. M., & POSNER, B. Z. *THE FIVE PRACTICES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP* IN KOUZES, J. M., & POSNER, B. Z. (2003). *ENCOURAGING THE HEART: A LEADER’S GUIDE TO REWARDING AND RECOGNIZING OTHERS*. SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY-BASS.

²⁵ P.88 ORTBERG, N. *REFLECTIONS ON ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT* IN KOUZES, J. M., & POSNER, B. Z. (2003).

²⁶ P. 98 IBID

2. Do I communicate clearly or carelessly?
3. Do I treat promises seriously or lightly
4. Am I forthright or dishonest?²⁷

Before people will be willing to follow a leader's vision or act on a leader's initiatives, they must trust their leader. Such trust cannot be demanded rather it must be earned.

Thrall, B., McNicol, B., & McElrath, K., *The Ascent of a Leader: How Ordinary Relationships Develop Extraordinary Character and Influence.*

A slightly different approach can be found in *The Ascent of a Leader*. Much of the authors' approach starts with the individual leader's basic attitude of trust, their trust in God. However in the development from that, there is little more than anecdotal content in which the reader has to draw conclusions. The main thrust of their argument is centred on the struggle of "how to create the kind of environment where individuals can soar above and beyond their best," whether in the home, the church or the workplace.²⁸

There is a whole chapter called *The First Rung: Stepping Up Through an Act of Trust*.²⁹ They helpfully develop the way we entrust ourselves to something, placing trust at the centre of our lives, though they then equate that with faith, without defining either. Trust for them is more like a series of steps or acts that require attitudes of humility and gratitude. Trust is also seen as a series of interpersonal transactions. You choose who to trust. We just can't trust anyone. In the end it is summed up by this passage

"Choosing to trust people, especially those who are different from ourselves, has a lot to do with trusting the One who is managing the path of our lives. When we understand and trust that our destiny rests in God's hands, we can with greater patience endure negative circumstances and difficult relationships... we gain the strength we need to trust people who have our best interests at heart, even at the risk of pain or personal loss. Why? Because we believe that God will work it out, somehow, for our good, no matter what happens."³⁰

Robinson, A. B. *Leadership for Vital Congregations.*

"Trust, especially in churches, is the currency of leadership. When the leaders have the trust of the congregation they lead, they can accomplish a great deal."³¹ Anthony Robinson takes this as the first and primary task for pastoral leadership, especially at the start of a new ministry, and understands that this work takes about five years for the pastor to be someone they know and trust³² There are seven strategies he lays out for the development of the partnership between the pastoral ministry, the leadership and the congregation during this time. They are not sequential, but need to happen together. The important thing that I see in his work is the grounding of all the other strategies in the first, that of Building Trust. He uses Weems description of trust having three dimensions: character, relationship and competence.³³ These dimensions are developed most helpfully in the rest of the section in a way that does not portray them as learned add-on skills. He is clear that trust is a two way thing and it is not simply a case of the pastor being the one who builds it between themselves and the congregation, but

²⁷ P.109 KOUZES, J. M., & POSNER, B. Z. (2003). *CREDIBILITY: HOW LEADERS GAIN IT AND LOSE IT, WHY PEOPLE DEMAND IT.* SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY BASS.

²⁸ P.29 THRALL, B., MCNICOL, B., & MCEL RATH, K. (1999). *THE ASCENT OF A LEADER: HOW ORDINARY RELATIONSHIPS DEVELOP EXTRAORDINARY CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE.* SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY-BASS.

²⁹ PP. 61-74 IBID.

³⁰ P. 72 IBID.

³¹ P. 50, ROBINSON, A. B. (2006), *LEADERSHIP FOR VITAL CONGREGATIONS.* CLEVELAND: THE PILGRIM PRESS.

³² P. 76 IBID

³³P. 51 IBID

that the congregation also has to be prepared to build and maintain trust with their pastor, leaders and the rest of the members of the congregation.

Later in the book he returns to the congregational part they play in the place of trust and uses systems theory as the tool to develop strategies.³⁴ He prefers this to the more business oriented organisational models where congregations tended to be elaborate networks of programmes and departments. While that is not the experience of many NZ congregations, the way we have often organised our Sessions and Parish Councils draws from this way of thinking so there are often separate committees or sub-committees for the various tasks and responsibilities.

The way Robinson suggests we work to transform our structures to a shape more in tune with contemporary culture is to begin with a deep spiritual renewal. It is this that I find linking in with the *Courage to Lead* work that I have experienced in the retreat and in reading the work of Parker Palmer. His work is useful in the first instance in helping the leadership get a better understanding of who they are and what their role is in a trust-filled environment. This is particularly important in what is currently apparent in much of the church at all levels, diminished and highly conditional trust. Congregations, as well as their leaders and pastors, need to work at building and sustaining trust that is covenantal in character rather than limited and contractual versions. Such covenantal trust requires the opening up of all parties to one another, so that with trust also comes openness to learning and change, forgiveness of one another's mistakes, and shared commitment to core values, and he suggests some simple strategies whereby the congregation can account for their side of the covenant, as well as those outlined for pastors earlier in the book.³⁵

PALMER, P. J. (2004). *A HIDDEN WHOLENESS: THE JOURNEY TOWARD AN UNDIVIDED LIFE.*

AT ONE LEVEL THIS BOOK IS A PRIMER FOR CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST FROM WHICH ALL ELSE FLOWS. WITHOUT AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST, THE SOUL WON'T APPEAR, THE INNER TEACHER CAN'T BE HEARD, THE SHARING OF OUR STRUGGLES WON'T OCCUR. ONCE THE PREMISE THAT WE ARE LIVING DIVIDED LIVES AND THAT WE DON'T WANT TO ANYMORE IS ACCEPTED, THEN THE QUESTION BECOMES ONE OF HOW WE MIGHT FIRST OF ALL MEND THE DIVISION AND THEN CONTINUE TO LIVE LIFE AS AN UNDIVIDED WHOLE.³⁶

PARKER PALMER ASKS WHERE WE MIGHT ACHIEVE THIS AND EXPLORES SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH OUR WESTERN CULTURE HAS RESPONDED.³⁷ I FIND THESE ECHOED IN TWO OTHER BOOKS WHICH HAVE GREATLY INFLUENCED MY THINKING IN RECENT TIMES, *THE DIFFERENT DRUM*³⁸ AND *FINDING THE STILL POINT*³⁹, WHERE THEY ALSO EXPLORE THE TECHNIQUE DRIVEN SOLUTIONS IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, AND STRESS RELIEF IN THE SECOND.

PARKER IS ALSO AWARE OF THE DYNAMICS OF MUCH OF THE GROUP WORK HE HAD EXPERIENCED AND HOW THEY WERE NOT SAFE PLACES FOR THE SOUL AS

³⁴ P. 90 FF. IBID

³⁵ P. 100 IBID

³⁶ P.17F PALMER, P. J. (2004). *A HIDDEN WHOLENESS: THE JOURNEY TOWARD AN UNDIVIDED LIFE.* SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY-BASS.

³⁷ P.21 IBID

³⁸ PECK, M. S. (1990). *THE DIFFERENT DRUM: COMMUNITY MAKING AND PEACE.* LONDON: ARROW BOOKS LTD.

³⁹ HARPUR, T. (2005). *FINDING THE STILL POINT: A SPIRITUAL RESPONSE TO STRESS.* KELOWNA: NORTHSTONE PUBLISHING.

THEY SET OUT TO CREATE COMMUNITY, BUT COMMUNITY USUALLY FOR A HIDDEN AGENDA: A FALSE COMMUNITY. HIS EXPERIENCE AT THE QUAKER COMMUNITY OF PENDLE HILL NEAR PHILADELPHIA HELPED FORM HIS PRACTICE WHICH HE DEVELOPED FIRST AS A MEANS OF HELPING TEACHERS COME TO THEMSELVES AND BEGIN LIVING AN UNDIVIDED LIFE IN ORDER THAT THEY MAY LIVE OUT THEIR VOCATION. THIS HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A CROSS-PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMME THAT FORMALLY RUNS UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL. BY BRINGING LEADERS TOGETHER IN CIRCLES OF TRUST THEY ARE INVITED TO EXPLORE THEIR INNER CALLING IN THE COMPANY OF OTHERS WHO ARE COMMITTED TO THAT SAME PROCESS.

AS I READ THE RESPONSES TO THE WORK IN THE EVALUATION BY JANET SMITH⁴⁰, AND IN THE COURAGE TO LEAD FOR CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS 2005 - 2008 PHASE 1 SUMMARY REPORT TO THE LILLY ENDOWMENT, INC.⁴¹, THIS WAS A POWERFUL IMPETUS FOR MANY OF THEM TO REINTEGRATE SOUL AND ROLE WITHIN THEIR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIVES, AND TAKE THE PRACTICE INTO THEIR CONGREGATIONS AS A WAY OF BUILDING OR REBUILDING TRUST, AND SO BUILD TRUE COMMUNITY.

ONE OF THE KEY CONSTRUCTS IN PARKER'S UNDERSTANDING IS THE PRACTICE OF "BEING ALONE TOGETHER".⁴² WITH PHRASES LIKE "BEING IN THE COMPANY OF STRANGERS" AND A "COMPANY OF SOLITUDES" ONE BEGINS TO GET A PICTURE OF A DIFFERENT KIND OF PLACE. THE TENDENCY OF SPLITTING SOLITUDE AND COMMUNITY INTO EITHER-OR RATHER THAN BOTH-AND POSITIONS WORKS AGAINST THE SOUL'S NEED TO FIND A HOSPITABLE SPACE IN WHICH WE FIND OUR TRUE SELF, WHICH KNOWS WHO WE ARE IN OUR INWARDNESS AND WHOSE WE ARE IN THE WIDER WORLD.

ONE OF THE CRITIQUES OFFERED OF HIS WORK HONES IN AT THIS POINT SAYING "THE MODEL OF SELFHOOD THAT PARKER PALMER EMPLOYS WITH ITS STRONG DEMARCATION BETWEEN INNER AND OUTER (ADMITTEDLY MEDIATED BY THE PRESENCE OF THE 'THIRD THING' AND HIS EMPHASIS UPON CONNECTIVENESS) STILL TENDS TO A PARTICULAR, WESTERN OR NORTHERN, UNDERSTANDING."⁴³ SMITH SUGGESTS WAYS THIS COULD BE OVERCOME OR STRENGTHENED, BUT CONCEDES ALSO IS THAT "A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF HIS AUDIENCE HAVE DIFFICULTY MOVING BEYOND THE CONSTRAINTS OF INDIVIDUALIZED NOTIONS OF SELFHOOD. THIS MEANS THAT WHILE HE PLACES CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS ON KNOWING AND BEING IN COMMUNITY - IT IS FILTERED BY MANY THROUGH A BOUNDED NOTION OF THE SELF."⁴⁴ I WOULD ANSWER THIS CRITIQUE BY THE PRAGMATIC RESPONSE OF SEEING HOW HIS APPROACH ACTUALLY INTERSECTS WITH WHERE PROFESSIONALS ARE FINDING THEMSELVES AT WITHIN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN CULTURE. THE

⁴⁰ SMITH, J. (2007). EVALUATION OF *CIRCLE OF TRUST* RETREATS. SUMMARY REPORT. [HTTP://COURAGERENEWAL.ORG/RESOURCES/EVALUATION](http://courageandrenewal.org/resources/evaluation).

⁴¹ COURAGE TO LEAD FOR CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS 2005 - 2008 PHASE 1 SUMMARY REPORT

⁴² P.54 PALMER, P. J. OP.CIT

⁴³ SMITH, M. K. (2005). PARKER J. PALMER: COMMUNITY, KNOWING AND SPIRITUALITY IN EDUCATION. *THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF INFORMAL EDUCATION*.

⁴⁴ IBID

OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE ASSESSMENT THAT JANET SMITH FOUND IN HER EVALUATION OF THE COURAGE TO LEAD® PROGRAMME, AS WELL AS THE PRACTICAL OUTWORKING THAT SHE HAD IDENTIFIED⁴⁵ SHOWED THAT WHETHER ONE'S INTERNAL NOTION OF INDIVIDUATION WAS SUFFICIENTLY WELL DEVELOPED OR NOT, THE PARTICIPANTS WERE NOT PREPARED TO LEAVE THE WORK AS SOMETHING ONE DID SOLELY TO ONESELF, BUT WERE COMMITTED TO ENRICHING THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITIES AND WORKPLACES THEY BELONGED TO.

IN RESPONSE THEN, ONE CAN SAY THAT USING THIS PRACTICE A PLACE OF TRUST CAN BE CREATED WHICH BUILDS TRUE COMMUNITY. THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT DEVELOP ARE TRUSTFUL IN THAT THEY COMBINE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE WITH HOPEFUL EXPECTANCY, AND BUILD A SPACE THAT SAFEGUARD AND ENCOURAGE THE INNER JOURNEY.

CONCLUSION.

MOST OF THE WRITING ON LEADERSHIP EITHER TAKES A TRUSTING ENVIRONMENT AS A GIVEN AND THE LEADER HAS TO WORK TO "EARN" TRUST. THOSE THAT TAKE THAT TACK DO NOT SEEM TO KNOW HOW THIS FITS IN, FOCUSED AS THEY ARE ON THE NECESSARY SKILLS OF A LEADER. I FOUND ROBINSON'S AND PARKER'S APPROACHES OFFERED THE BEST WAY INTO UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF TRUST.

⁴⁵ SMITH, J. (2007). OP.CIT.

Community as Organisation or Organism, and Circles of Trust

Anne Mills wrote in her Masters thesis (unpublished) that a “research possibility would be to explore if and how systems theory... might allow the theory of transformational leadership to be put into practice.”⁴⁶ She has rightly seen that systems theory intersects with but is not the same as organisational theory, this latter being the driver for much of the writing on leadership within the church. Her approach would be to suggest that systems theory applied to the church is more about how Christian communities learn together and refashion themselves in the light of long term goals. Referring to Egan’s work in *Change Agent Skills in Helping and Human Service Settings* (1985 Monterey, Brooks/Cole), she sees that transformational leaders have a deep sense of purpose for the system and a long-range strategic sense. This intersects with Anne’s perspective that sees such leaders offering people a vision that unites leaders and followers in commitment to changing a situation for the better.⁴⁷

I am inclined to take a slightly different perspective grounded in my earlier work on systems theory in congregational settings done for my Masters thesis. There I used one of the earlier pioneers in the application of systems theory in relation to congregational life, E Mansill Pattison.⁴⁸ One of the key differences that I see is that a systems approach begins with the premise that the congregation is to be compared to an organism rather than using a business organisational and management approach. There are some crossover points between each approach, especially about the need for particular skill sets for those in leadership, but where I would assess that they part company is in the place and function of the leader in each model.

In the organisational model there is acknowledgement of the wider role of the community, but no real ability to discuss the complex interplay of interpersonal and community dynamics. Thung, following Gouldner, characterises the church as an open social system⁴⁹. What this means is that there are two important aspects to consider. One is the interdependence of every member of that system, and the other, that being “open” means that the members and the system itself are open to influence from the external environment in an extremely differentiated variety of ways.

Much of the leadership literature I have had access to seems to promote that the leader is responsible for shaping the way the organisation responds to its environment and to the stressors that build up within it. It is clear from the processes offered by Parker Palmer that he envisages something different, that the discernment processes for the community are best done by the community, and also that the individual’s discernment is also clearer when done within the communal context as well.

The idea of community as an organism takes us in a different direction. As well as the structural nature of organisational models, from the business perspective, an organisation functions best when it has a single aim or purpose, or at least a minimal number of goals. Where there is a multiplicity of goals the energy of the organisation is dissipated and cannot be effectively utilised. To understand the church as an open social system is to understand that there may be at any one time a number of things happening within the life of the community which may not cohere within a limited set of goals or ends.

⁴⁶ P.158 MILLS, A. (2004). *REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP IN MINISTRY IN THE TIKANGA PAKEHA ANGLICAN CHURCH IN AOTEAROA, NEW ZEALAND*. UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND, AUCKLAND.

⁴⁷ P.158 *ibid*

⁴⁸ PATTISON, E. M. (1977). *PASTOR AND PARISH—A SYSTEMS APPROACH*. PHILADELPHIA: FORTRESS PRESS.

⁴⁹ Pp 28 ff. Thung, M. A. (1976). *The Precarious Organisation: Sociological Explorations of the Church's Mission and Structure* (5). Hague: Mouton.

One of the catch cries of the current church leadership material is that the church exists for mission. That can be understood within the parameters of both organisational and organic models, but how they are so understood are quite different. In an organisation the prime goal or purpose of the body needs quite a tight definition. Applied to the “missional” church such thinking requires mission to be something that can be quantified and limited. “An organisation is distinct ... in that it opts for *certain goals and purposes* and rejects others.”⁵⁰ This happens both consciously and unconsciously.

There are writers that are quite clear, especially those within the “Church Growth” perceptual framework, about what the mission of the church must be. The advantage of such an approach is that it allows the community to gain a very clear and narrow focus, and build an appropriate organisation around such concepts, and with that also choose the type of leader best suited for such a mission. Others make such assumptions unconsciously and write about leadership from that perception. One recent example is Jerry Wofford’s *Transforming Christian Leadership*⁵¹. His analysis of leadership does come from some research, but his chapter on the vision of the organisation highlights a top down model of envisioning the future for the community of faith.

Transforming Christian leaders envisage as ideal future that gives direction to their organisations. They articulate and enlist support for these visions until they permeate their organisations. Jesus taught his disciples to be leaders with *visions*.⁵²

Thung, in her analysis of what mission encompasses, came up with five areas that needed to be addressed within the framework of thinking about the missionary church. These were the place of nationalistic and other mundane interests, change in history as it relates to God’s work of transformation, the place of the church in cooperating with this change, the social and political tasks that are implicit in the vision of bring about God’s new world, and the development of a Christian way of living.⁵³ The problem with trying to “operationalise” these into an organisation’s structure is that they are related to ultimate meanings and therefore very difficult to turn into specific goals and outcomes. Even the very concept of mission itself is difficult to pin down. The primary purposes of a church consist of fully non-operational goals and because by its very nature faith is concerned with the whole of life that gives it a maximum of virtually possible goals.⁵⁴ To constrain them within organisational structures is a difficult task.

A better prospect is to see the church as an organism, or an open system. This accepts that like any natural organism there are a variety of environmental influences that may be in play, as well as the internal forces from the interplay of relationships. The combination of elements that are responded to along with the peculiar elements of its own differs from one social system to the other. While there may be agreement on collective goals between similar systems, the combination of environment and make up means that each will have its own unique solution to the question of which goals to make the key goals for the time being, and which ones to put to one side or even ignore completely.

It is instructive that the Natural Church Development movement created by Christian Schwarz understands this and has tried to develop a methodology to help congregations to identify which of the key goals they need to attend to. This also depends very much on how the leadership of the congregation sees the coherence of the data with their own perceptions.

⁵⁰ P 113. *ibid*

⁵¹ Wofford., J. C. (1999). *Transforming Christian Leadership: 10 Exemplary Church Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

⁵² P.17 *Ibid*.

⁵³ P.68 Thung

⁵⁴ P 122f. *ibid*

It is into this that we need to look at the place of leadership. Anthony Robinson has addressed this in his book *Leadership for Vital Congregations*⁵⁵ and in particular in Chapter 2. He examines a number of models and draws insights from them all that anyone in leadership should consider. As well, he recognises the dynamics within congregations and how leadership is only one of the factors that leads to a congregation being a vital living body. Like Wofford, he picks up the transactional and transformational leadership distinction, but recognises that there is a larger purpose, a higher calling, a new creation to be put before both pastor and people and in response to which, all may be transformed.⁵⁶

A number of writers along with Robinson refer to the work of Edwin Friedman who clearly uses insights from family systems therapy and differentiates between leadership as expertise and leadership understood as self-definition. In recognising the multi-purpose nature of an open social system such as a church, Friedman's insights show that leadership through expertise can only go so far, and that the capacity for self-definition is a far more productive way to travel. The greatest strength a leader brings into such a setting is the ability to articulate and act on goals and values that are central and rooted in the faith of the community.⁵⁷

Robinson introduces the work of Ronald Heifetz in which he distinguishes between "technical" and "adaptive" work. This is particularly important in situations where there are no easy answers or ready solutions.⁵⁸ The ending of the era of establishment for the Protestant mainline denominations has created a crisis for many churches and congregations. Using Heifetz's insights, Robinson describes how many have tried to use a "technical" approach by trying to define the problem and so coming up with a solution which entails the development of some sort of technique. There are two problems with such an approach. One is that it does not take into account the changed environment the church is now in. The other is that techniques require experts and so congregations depend on them for the "right" solutions, strategies or programmes.⁵⁹

Margaret Wheatley draws insights from quantum science and chaos theory and links that to organisational behaviour that she has observed. Control and the keeping of disorder at bay seem to be an important set of behaviours for many organisations and their leaders. Wheatley felt these behaviours betrayed a deep distrust and a misunderstanding of the nature of the universe. The better response, using these insights, was that leaders should trust in the capacity of living systems to seek health and renewal.⁶⁰

Finally, Robinson introduces the work of Parker Palmer who has focussed on the role of the leader who brings their whole "undivided self" to the task of leadership. Leadership originates not in the mastery of technique or of information, but much more in the deep self-knowledge and courage of living a life of inner congruence and wholeness. This helps create a climate of trust in which others can respond and develop. This in turn enriches the life of the whole community.⁶¹

What interests me about these approaches that Robinson finds so attractive is that they fit very much with the work of Mady Thung as she looked for the appropriate style of leadership for the missionary church. Once again she addresses the issue of ultimate goals and unstructured tasks that form themselves around such goals. The primary issue is of developing a mutually supportive framework of relationships where all are involved in the interpretation of the narrowing of the ultimate goals to

⁵⁵ Robinson, A. B. (2006). *Leadership for Vital Congregations*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press.

⁵⁶ P. 38 *ibid*

⁵⁷ P. 38f *ibid*

⁵⁸ P. 42 *ibid*

⁵⁹ P. 44 *ibid*

⁶⁰ P. 46 *ibid*

⁶¹ P. 41f *ibid*

workable proximate ends. She identified four dimensions that were important for leaders to be effective. These were support, interaction facilitation, goal emphasis and goal facilitation. Leadership then is part of the whole, and to be truly effective the leader needs to be able to adapt their style and modify their role and functions according to the needs of the group.⁶²

Here for me lies a possible way for the integration of work such as the Circles of Trust that Parker Palmer has developed. It clearly understands the need to adapt to the environment that one is placed in whether as a member or as a leader (or indeed as both). Robinson suggests a number of strategies for pastoral leaders to be aware of. The first and most important is that of building trust.⁶³ He recognises that this is an ongoing task throughout the term of the ministry. Further it is an element that must have a two-way street. Congregations have a role to play in developing an environment in which trust can be placed in the pastoral leadership. Transformational leadership is all very well, but it can't happen without people to transform. That emphasises the importance of the invitational and covenantal part of the congregational system. The congregation exists for some greater purpose (those ultimate goals). This awareness must already be present in some shape or form before the pastoral leader is integrated into the congregation. Similarly, Robinson suggests that for the leadership group to function effectively, it too must be motivated by the same sense of purpose of the church and of what God has called the church to do, and have an understanding of the congregation as an open social system, rather than as an organisation which appears to be a collection of discreet and competing programmes.⁶⁴

The leadership group then has to build an inner coherence. The Circle of Trust process lends itself to this quite clearly. While it seems to address the individual's perception of themselves, the ability to gain clarity of one's own sense of purpose and inner motivation has the potential to bring strength to the growth process.

Through the reflective process we learn about our own journey and are taught to see that it does not compete with anyone else's journey or insights. Rather, the insights others bring to the same piece of reflection help us understand our own ground that much better. Further, in addressing the issues of the environments our congregations are situated in, the open exploration provides a broader picture that all can benefit from exploring. At the personal level, learning to trust our own insights and inner teacher opens us up to trusting others within the group (and their inner teachers). This creates an environment that can be taken back to the regular meeting and functioning of the leadership group as it seeks to bring the congregation's vision to some sort of action point.

Transformative and adaptive leadership depends primarily on relationship and this is the crux of the process in a circle of trust. Truth resides neither in some external authority nor in the momentary convictions of each or some individual (even if that individual is the designated "leader"). It resides between us, in the tension of the ongoing conversation, where the voice of truth we think we hear within can be checked and balanced by the voices of truth others think they are hearing. This process of communal discernment also honours the soul by finding a path between realities that may defeat us and fantasies that are mere escapes. In an environment of trust together we can bring down the walls that separate us from our own souls.⁶⁵

The circle of trust model offers leaders a chance to evaluate where they are on their own journey of faith and the journey of faith of the congregation. It gives a chance to focus on deep listening from within the community and to each other, and in doing so creates a soul-safe place that allows discernment about the ultimate goals, the questions of meaning and purpose, for each person and for

⁶² P. 262ff Thung

⁶³ P. 50 Robinson

⁶⁴ P. 91 *ibid*

⁶⁵ P.182-4 Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

the community.⁶⁶ It models a trustworthy form of life together that supports each one's inner journey, and strengthens the team for work within the congregation so that the greater purpose of joining God's mission to the world can be lived out with vigour and joy and in full community. With these attributes of the circle work, we can see how the issues raised by Thung, Robinson and others can be addressed so that the leadership of the congregation and the life of the community in God may be strengthened.



⁶⁶ P.18 Fenner, J. (2009) *The Courage to Lead: A Retreat Program for Clergy and Congregational Leaders. Weavings, XXIV, 2.*

Circles of Trust for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING ON A COURAGE TO LEAD® RETREAT HAS OPENED MY EYES TO THE POSSIBILITIES FOR OUR MINISTRY AND CONGREGATIONS. I HAVE REFLECTED ON THE PROCESS IN THE OTHER ESSAYS IN THIS COLLECTION, BUT WOULD NOW LIKE TO EXPLORE HOW WE MIGHT USE THIS PROCESS MORE INTENTIONALLY.

IN THEIR EVALUATION FOR THE LILLY FOUNDATION THE COURAGE TO LEAD GROUP SAW THAT ONE OF THE GOALS WAS TO EXPLORE HOW COT PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO THE STRENGTHENING AND VITALITY OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE. THEY BELIEVE THAT THE BROAD MAINSTREAM OF CHRISTIAN TRADITION, WHOSE CORE VALUES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THREATENED BY CULTURAL FORCES, IS NOT DYING, BUT IS IN THE MESSY AND YET CREATIVE PROCESS OF RECONSTITUTING ITSELF. SOME OF THIS FERMENT IS EMERGING FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE SOUGHT SUSTENANCE OUTSIDE THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS BUT, WHO STILL BELONG “IN THEIR MINDS,” AND WHO MIGHT WELL JOIN IN THE EFFORT TO CREATE SPIRITUALLY REVITALISED CONGREGATIONS. SOME OF THE FERMENT IS HAPPENING IN THE LIFE-GIVING CONVERSATIONS THAT OCCUR WHEN PEOPLE MEET ACROSS LINES OF ROLE, DENOMINATION, AND FAITH TRADITION, DISCOVERING THAT THEY REFRACT GOD’S LIGHT IN DIFFERENT WAYS AND CAN HELP ILLUMINE EACH OTHER’S WORLD. AND SOME OF THIS FERMENT IS HAPPENING WITHIN VITAL CONGREGATIONS THAT EXHIBIT COHERENCE, AUTHENTICITY, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT ON MEMBERS. UNDERSTANDING HOW CRITICAL THESE QUALITIES ARE TO RENEWAL, THEY BELIEVE THAT THEIR PROGRAMME HAS SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARD INCREASED VITALITY.

STRENGTHS OF CIRCLE OF TRUST PROCESS NOTED BY PARTICIPANTS

- ❧ **SAFETY** – *IT WAS A SAFE PLACE, THE CLEARNESS COMMITTEES DEMONSTRATED JUST HOW TRUSTWORTHY, GENEROUS AND LOVING PEOPLE CAN BE AND HOW ACCOUNTABLE WE CAN BE TO ONE ANOTHER TO HOLD RULES THAT KEEP US SAFE.*
- ❧ **HOSPITALITY OF FACILITATORS AND RETREAT SPACE**
- ❧ **CREATION OF COMMUNITY**
- ❧ **SHARED PRACTICES**
 - INVITATIONAL NATURE
 - CONFIDENTIALITY
 - INQUIRY AND REFLECTION
 - DEEP PRESENCE TO SELF AND ONE ANOTHER: LISTENING, NO FIXING, SPEAKING FOR SELF
 - CLEARNESS COMMITTEE
- ❧ **PARADOXES OF FORMATIONAL SPACE**
 - OPEN YET BOUNDED
 - HOSPITABLE YET CHARGED
 - VOICE OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND VOICE OF THE GROUP
 - PERSONAL STORIES AND ARCHETYPAL STORIES
 - SOLITUDE YET COMMUNITY
 - SPEECH AND SILENCE

❧ **SEASONAL THEME OF RETREAT SESSIONS** PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED A DEEP CONNECTION TO THE SEASONAL THEME AND MOVEMENT THROUGH THE SEASONS OVER TIME. *“RITUALS WITH NATURE WERE POWERFUL, A LIFE SOURCE, NATURE WAS MY GUIDE, RESONATING, NEW TO ME IN A NEW WAY, SIMPLE ELEMENT THAT GAVE LANGUAGE AND METAPHOR FOR LIFE EXPERIENCE”*

❧ **USE OF “THIRD THING” AND FORMATIVE QUESTION** PARTICIPANTS REFLECTED AND RESPONDED THEOLOGICALLY OR MADE THEOLOGICAL TRANSLATION WHEN PROMPTED WITH A THIRD THING OR FORMATIVE QUESTION.

❧ **SLOW PACE OF RETREATS**

THEY FOUND THAT BOTH CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS EXPERIENCED AND NAMED THE CIRCLE OF TRUST APPROACH AS A SAFE PLACE TO NAME AND CELEBRATE THE GIFTS, STRENGTHS, SUCCESSES AND HOPEFUL VISION THAT HELP MINISTRY TO FLOURISH, AND AS A SAFE PLACE TO EXPLORE INNER-LIFE ISSUES THAT MAY INHIBIT THE EXERCISE OF MINISTRY. SPECIFICALLY PARTICIPANTS NOTED THAT COTS:

- WERE A SAFE COMMUNITY TO EXPLORE MATTERS OF THE SOUL
- PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY AND PROCESS FOR DEEP AND ONGOING DISCERNMENT ON THEIR CALL TO MINISTRY
- OFFERED AND MODELLED SHARED PRACTICES LIKE DEEP LISTENING, ASKING OF OPEN AND HONEST QUESTIONS, AND THE SUSPENSION OF JUDGEMENT AND THE URGE TO ADVISE AND “FIX” OTHERS THAT CAN SERVE THEM IN THEIR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES
- CREATED A CALL BACK TO THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF SILENCE, INQUIRY AND REFLECTION, MEDITATION, AND PRAYER THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO SELF-CARE AND MAINTAINING A VITAL MINISTRY

FURTHER, CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS EXPERIENCED AND NAMED THE CIRCLE OF TRUST APPROACH AS A MODEL OF COMMUNITY FOR HEALING AND GROWTH AND STRENGTHENING THEIR CAPACITY FOR LEADERSHIP. SPECIFICALLY, A COMMUNITY WAS CREATED WHERE CLERGY/LEADERS COULD “LET DOWN THE ARMOUR” OF THEIR ROLES.

I AM INTRIGUED BY A RETREAT THAT WOULD CENTRE ON ONE'S VOCATION AND INNER LIFE. IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT ONE HAS THE SPACE AND TIME TO EXPLORE THE DEEPER MEANING OF ONE'S JOURNEY IN LIFE AND HOW ALL FACETS OF ONE'S LIFE JOURNEY CONTRIBUTE TO WHOLENESS. I HAVE HAD RETREAT EXPERIENCES THAT FOCUS ON ONE'S “CALL TO HOLINESS” BUT “WHOLENESS” IS INDEED A NEW PATHWAY TO EXPLORE!

IT IS CLEAR THAT IN SPITE OF BEST INTENTIONS AND EFFORTS, THE CHURCH COMMUNITY CANNOT ALWAYS BE A SAFE PLACE WHERE THE SOUL CAN BE KNOWN AND WHERE PEOPLE CAN DISCOVER AND LISTEN FOR THEIR OWN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIVINE, NOR FEEL SAFE IN COMMUNITY. ONE OF THE GIFTS OF THE CIRCLE OF TRUST RETREAT IS THAT IT CREATES STRONG BOUNDARIES WHERE TRADITIONAL INTERACTIONS ARE DROPPED, AND A NEW KIND OF SHARING AND LISTENING IS POSSIBLE, ONE THAT INVITES US INTO OUR

DEPTHS, WHERE WE YEARN TO SWIM. IT CREATES SPACES WHERE THE SOUL IS RESPECTED IN MANY WAYS, AND IS PROTECTED THROUGH DEEP CONFIDENTIALITY.

THOSE COMMENTS ARE DRAWN FROM THE EVALUATION REPORT AVAILABLE ON THE COURAGE AND RENEWAL CENTER WEB SITE.

AS I REFLECT ON THEM AND MY OWN EXPERIENCE ON ONE OF THE COURAGE TO LEAD® RETREATS I CAN SEE A NUMBER OF POSSIBILITIES FOR THE USE OF THIS PROCESS.

- ❧ THE FIRST WOULD BE TO CREATE A SERIES OF RETREATS SIMILAR IN FORMAT FOR CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS. FROM MY PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS, ONE OF THE CLEAR ISSUES IS THAT OF "FORMATION." WHILE THE GAINING OF SKILLS AND REFRESHMENT OF ESTABLISHED ONES IS IMPORTANT, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT MANY OF THE ISSUES BEING DEALT WITH BY MINISTERS AT THE CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL ARE MORE TO DO WITH WHERE THEY ARE IN THEMSELVES AND HOW THAT INTERSECTS WITH WHERE THEIR CONGREGATION IS.
- ❧ THE SECOND WOULD BE TO INVITE THAT GROUP TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN CLEARNESS COMMITTEES AND PROVIDE TRAINING TO DO THAT. THE CLEARNESS COMMITTEE IS NOT NECESSARILY TIED TO ITS PLACE IN THE RETREAT PROCESS. THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING ABLE TO LISTEN TO ONE'S SOUL IN THE COMPANY OF OTHERS WHO ARE TRUSTED AND WHO ARE SIMPLY THERE TO SUPPORT IN THE PROCESS BY CREATING A SPACE FOR THE SOUL TO APPEAR HAS A POWER THAT CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED IN TERMS OF EACH PERSON'S SPIRITUAL HEALTH.
- ❧ THE THIRD POSSIBILITY WOULD BE TO INTRODUCE CIRCLES OF TRUST PROCESS INTO CONGREGATIONAL GROUPS IN A MODIFIED WAY. THE PROCESS OF FORMATIVE QUESTIONING AND REFLECTIVE LISTENING, AND THE CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST WOULD GO A LONG WAY TO STRENGTHENING A CONGREGATIONS ABILITY TO DISCERN A HOPEFUL FUTURE. THESE COULD HAPPEN WITHOUT GOING ON AN EXTENDED RETREAT THAT WOULD LIMIT ITS AVAILABILITY FOR MANY.

THE NEXT QUESTION IS HOW TO DEVELOP TRAINING IN THE PROCESS. FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH JANET SMITH AND SALLY HARE IN CANBERRA, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL IS COMMITTED TO A NATIONAL RATHER THAN INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY. THEY ARE PREPARED TO ALLOW ONE OR TWO FROM OUTSIDE THE STATES TO PUT THEIR NAMES FORWARD, BUT THE SELECTION AND MENTORING PROCESS FOR PROSPECTIVE FACILITATORS IS BOTH LONG AND INTENSIVE. THERE IS THE BEGINNING OF A FLEDGLING MOVEMENT IN AUSTRALIA THAT SEES THE POSSIBILITY OF DEVELOPING THIS WORK IN AUSTRALASIA, AND JANET WOULD BE A KEY PERSON IN THIS. ONE POSSIBILITY WOULD BE TO INVITE HER TO DELIVER SOME FACILITATOR TRAINING AND WE SEEK SPONSORSHIP TO UNDERWRITE THIS. A SECOND POSSIBILITY IS TO GATHER THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD OF THE WORK AND ARE INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING IT AS A WAY OF SUPPORTING AND WE FIND A WAY TO TRAIN OURSELVES. THERE ARE THREE OF US WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS WORK, TWO OF WHOM ARE INVOLVED IN THE PCANZ, AND I AM SURE OUR EXPERIENCE COULD BE USED AS PART OF THE FORMATIVE PROCESS.



Personal Description

MY NAME IS ALISTAIR MCBRIDE

I AM A MINISTER IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND, BEGINNING MY MINISTRY IN 1979, AFTER HAVING TRAINED AS A SCIENCE TEACHER AND TAUGHT FOR THREE YEARS AT SECONDARY LEVEL. I AM NOW IN MY FIFTH APPOINTMENT, SCOTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN HAMILTON, AND HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE FEBRUARY 1996.

I AM MARRIED TO DENISE AND HAVE THREE CHILDREN, TWO LIVING WITH PARTNER/HUSBAND AWAY FROM HAMILTON AND OUR YOUNGEST STILL WITH US BUT IN THE TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY AND FLATTING. FOR THE LAST SIX YEARS DENISE HAS HAD ONGOING SURGERY AND TREATMENT FOR BREAST CANCER AND RELATED ISSUES.

SCOTS IS IN A SUBURBAN AREA 7 KM FROM THE HAMILTON CBD. IT HAS SEVEN PRIMARY AND INTERMEDIATE SCHOOLS THREE OF WHICH HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE AREA SINCE ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY 1950'S. THE AREA IS ALSO CHARACTERISED BY A HIGHER THAN AVERAGE NUMBER OF OVER 60'S AND SO MUCH OF THE ACTIVITY REVOLVES AROUND SERVICING THEIR NEEDS. THE WHOLE SUBURB IS BASICALLY A DORMITORY SUBURB AS THERE IS NO INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN AND ALL ACTIVITIES, SHOPPING, LEISURE, ENTERTAINMENT AND SO FORTH HAPPEN OUTSIDE IT.

THE CONGREGATION HAS GROWN UP WITH THE SUBURB BUT IS NOW AT THE STAGE WHERE THE OLDER MEMBERS ARE DYING, OR MOVING OUT OF THE FAMILY SIZE HOMES THAT MAKE UP MUCH OF THE SUBURB. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF EFFECTS ON THE CONGREGATION. ONE IS THAT THE OLDER MEMBERS ARE NOW MUCH MORE A GATHERED COMMUNITY THAT STILL HAS THE VIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT TIME OF THE AREA AT THEIR HEART. THEY WANT TO SEE THE CHURCH COMMUNITY RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS, BUT NO LONGER KNOW WHAT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IS. THE NEWER MEMBERS ARE DRAWN IN BY THE WARMTH OF WELCOME AND QUIET HEALING PRESENCE THAT WE HAVE BUILT UP. THEY WOULD LIKE TO FIND WAYS TO MAKE THAT HEALING PRESENCE MUCH MORE ACTIVE.

A FRIEND HAD PASSED ON A HIDDEN WHOLENESS FOR ME TO READ AND I FOUND MYSELF DRAWN TO PARKER PALMER'S WHOLE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP AND TRUST. I THEN RECEIVED MY COPY OF THE JAN/FEB ISSUE OF WEAVINGS WHICH SHOWED HOW HIS IDEAS AND METHODS HAD INFLUENCED OTHERS. IT ALSO GAVE DETAILS OF THE WEB-SITE WHICH I FOLLOWED THROUGH TO SEE WHAT COURSES WERE AVAILABLE, AND WITH STUDY LEAVE COMING UP, WHETHER THEY WOULD FIT MY NEEDS. THE RETREAT HAS COME AT AN OPPORTUNE TIME. AFTER 13 YEARS MINISTRY HERE I NEED TO REFLECT UPON THAT TIME, AND ALSO ON WHAT THE FUTURE MIGHT LOOK LIKE. I HAVE BEGUN THAT REFLECTIVE PROCESS WITH MY COUNCIL OF ELDERS. I AM NOT EXPECTING ANSWERS, RATHER LOOKING FOR A GUIDED TIME WHERE I CAN LAY OUT THE ISSUES I AM GRAPPLING WITH. ONE POSSIBILITY THAT SUGGESTS ITSELF IS BECOMING A FACILITATOR FOR THIS PROCESS MYSELF WITHIN THE NEW ZEALAND SETTING.

AS I AM 57 NOW, AND HAVE EIGHT OR SO YEARS BEFORE RETIREMENT, I HAVE A NUMBER OF VOCATION AND LEADERSHIP ISSUES. THEY REVOLVE AROUND DISCERNMENT, PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE KAIROS (RIGHT TIME) MOMENTS THAT MAY COME BEFORE ME. IS THERE A RIGHT TIME TO LEAVE, OR SHOULD I STAY UNTIL RETIREMENT? THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SHAPE AND SPEED OF WHAT I DO WITHIN THIS CONGREGATION AND WITH THE ELDERSHIP. WE HAVE BEEN FORMING AND REFORMING THIS GROUP, TO THE STAGE THAT THERE ARE ONLY THREE OF THE ELDERS SERVING WHO WERE ON THE COUNCIL WHEN I ARRIVED. IN THE DYNAMIC OF THE CHURCH IN NEW ZEALAND, THERE IS INCREASING PRESSURE ON SMALL CONGREGATIONS, FINANCIALLY AND WITH PERSONNEL TOO, SO AS A GROUP WE/THEY NEED TO HAVE GREATER LEVELS OF TRUST IN ORDER TO WORK EFFECTIVELY AT A TIME WHEN THERE IS INCREASING UNCERTAINTY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY AS WELL. ONE IMPLICATION OF DISCERNING "NOW" AS THE TIME TO GO IS THE NEED TO FIND TOOLS TO STRENGTHEN THIS GROUP IN PARTICULAR BEFORE I DEPART. AN IMPLICATION OF DISCERNING "LATER" IS THE NEED TO CONTINUE TO WORK ALONG THESE LINES AND NOT "FALL ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL."

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