

What enables the enablers to enable a congregation? – 1st draft with end notes.

1. Introduction

If the future of the church is one of smaller numbers. The choice is stark.

One is for fewer congregations which gather together highly mobile attendees in places to which they can conveniently travel (and park the car). This would probably suit the suburban folk, some of whom are money rich and time poor. The other choice is for smaller, dispersed, local congregations who will be served by volunteer ministry rather than on paid clergy. This would suit congregations of folk who are get paid less money, some of whom are time rich and money poor; people for whom the use of cars is more rare and petrol costs are an unwanted expense. So the future of the church is not a matter of either /or, but both. Each of these scenarios will require an enabled voluntary ministry but this paper endeavours to address the qualities and skills that support the enabling interventionists who set out to establish, mentor, and train local, even indigenous, lay and ordained volunteer ministry for small, local, and possibly poorer congregations.

I have identified that, for the interventionist to be helpful to less affluent communities, there are four strains of purposefulness that the interventionist might let seep into their bones, and as part of their being, be a support to the tasks involved. They would be as qualities that might form and grow as a kind of ontological becoming. They might be as a reservoir to draw upon as we exercise a conscious use of self in our work of mentoring and providing learning opportunities. I hope that in describing these strains my selection will be clear but not viewed as the only things that can be offered. I have named them as:

- The contemplative strain
- The learning about small group work strain
- The community development strain (including power analysis)
- The inculturation strain

2. The contemplative strain

Stillness of the soul and the practise of the presence of God is a gift that cannot be conjured up. It is wonderful resource to those who are enablers. Contemplation may be personal prayer but it is never private. When one become aware of the presence of God one is immediately aware that there are hundreds and thousands and more other people there already. Maybe this is what Carl Jung was referring to when he talked about the collective unconscious¹ because we are aware in our quiet adoration that at the ground of our being we are united with God's creatures and all his creation. Prayer is not only a personal attachment with God but a connection with more than a community; far more than a community, a Kingdom. This ceaseless round of praise that we enjoy and enjoy is always there waiting for us. This collective root of our being with God resources the way we see the social. It reminds us that what goes on between us is always related to what goes on between us and God. Our social life is empowered and engaged with the Kingdom of heaven. It means that when we set out to enable congregations we take with us our own being enabled. What goes on between people is a primary source for witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit. Contemplation enables us to connect with God as the very people we are. But most of all we are people who have been immersed in the encompassing love that sets aside its power to control and to

witness what God can do. It reminds us that to follow Jesus is to enable and not to control. It reminds us that to follow Jesus is to hear the thoughts of many and maybe not to teach. It reminds us that to follow Jesus is to act together in adoration, reverence and respect in earth as in heaven. Contemplation is a strain to seek as it can mould the hearts of enablers with the enabling spirit.

3. The learning about small group work strain

The knowledge of how groups work can, in large part, be learned and is a great giftⁱⁱ. Whilst we are often blessed with instincts about these things there is work worth doing for an enabler of a congregation. What roles do people adopt? How do these various roles sustain the life of a group and contribute to its tasks? How do people get trapped and how can they be freed from 'role sets'? Do followers of Christ need leaders other than the Good Shepherd himself? What is a leadership intervention? Are the leaders in the church leaders because they are seen as the first to follow Christ? Is there such a thing as a leader who has no followers? What is a task leader and what is a socio-emotional leader? Is non-verbal communication more powerful than the spoken word? What are the interactions between people in a group? Are there common processes? What does the enabler do with a non-directive approach when working with a group? All these questions indicate an arena called 'working with small groups'. An understanding of these issues, and more, can enable the enabler to bring with them a sense of analysis, and maybe purpose, to the process of a congregation seeking to be enabled to work together. Understanding small groups is a strain to seek. It can help a group of folk to unlock the necessary perspectives that lie among them. It enables the enabling spirit to become real and alive in practise.

4. The community development strain (including power analysis)

Community Development is a process of social action in which people of a community organise, plan and act; define their common and personal needs and problems; make group and personal plans to meet needs, problems, and take advantage of opportunities.ⁱⁱⁱ Central to this idea are the notions of participation and structural analysis. This is, perhaps, where the liberation thinking from Latin America most meets the issues of enabling. 'Participation' can be a word that is used to cover many possibilities. It may indicate anything on a spectrum from manipulation through to consultation to partnership to local control^{iv}. So helping people make a power analysis is crucial to any attempts at community development. One of the important things a local congregation needs to be aware of is that power that is given is no power. Power that can be given can always be taken away. Power is something that is taken not something that is given^v. This awareness will save disillusion and disappointment. It also helps realistic goal setting. It also helps with the negotiation of initiatives because those who complain most about dependency culture can be the first to behave in ways that is frightened to let power be taken by others. Praxis theologies^{vi} are of great benefit when enablers are looking to enable. They are a great gift. They enable the enabling spirit to become real and alive in practise.

5. The inculturation strain

Inculturation^{vii} is a means of evangelisation that looks to express faith in the mediums of the local culture. Speaking and doing the gospel in local categories is fundamental and this is not always as easy as it sounds. For example, in some communities when you say 'your family' it is heard to mean the 2.4 persons who occupy one house. In another it might mean a host of sisters and their children

and men-folk spread across a number of households as family in its extended form. There will be cultural and sub-cultural variations in language use. Inculturation also suggests a penetration of the local culture by Christian beliefs and values. A correlation of faith and culture might be emphasised but also looking through the eyes of a culture or sub-culture might reveal God in a new way. So mission is not just promoting self-governing, self-supporting and self propagating congregations but also, and maybe more importantly, self-theologising^{viii}.

It is important to note that the interventionist, or enabler, does not have to be of the culture but must be willing to be closely attentive to it and desire local congregations to be faithful to it, even when the faith is challenging its practises. (The evangelisation of cultures will come from re-orientations within the culture and these will only be helped, and not moved, by forces from outside. Cultures are continually adjusting to technological and ecological pressures. There is nothing static about culture unless it is consigned to a museum.)

Little can be more affirming than trusting a community to see God through the eyes of its own culture^{ix} and this affirmation is a ground of enabling. The sad reality is that some communities experience so-called enablers as professionals who are paid to 'make us like them'. A familiarity with, and some practise of, the mission stance we call inculturation enables the enabling spirit to become real and actual in practise.

6. Enabling the enablers

Often one is often faced with the question about training the trainers. Without doubt there is a place for training in any enabling ministry. What I am suggesting is that there is a need to give attention to how enablers develop a stance, an attitude; a way that means their very being exudes what they stand for. It is something like that which is suggested by one of the Benedictine vows known as 'conversion of manners.'^x I believe that the above are strains that are part of this endeavour and can be fostered as part of the spiritual formation of the enablers. These strains could be part of the vocational response of those in enabling ministry. It seems to me to be that attention to this is as important, if not more important, than the pure acquisition of skills or knowledge. It gives attention to what we are and not just what we know and what we can do.

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ⁱ Carl Jung *The Structure of the Psyche*, Collected Works Vol. 8, par. 325

ⁱⁱ See; Cartwright and Zander, 1963). Shepard, 1956; Bion, 1959; Gibb, 1978', Wells, 1990),

ⁱⁱⁱ For example in UK see: *Community work and social change. A Report on Training*. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1968. Longman.

^{iv} Sherri Arnstiens eight rung ladder of citizen participation is quoted in many places. I suggest *Attacking Poverty through participation*. Concetta Benn PIT publishing 1981

^v See Paulo Friere. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin. 1972

^{vi} See *Models of Contextual Theology*. Steven Bevans orbis 1994

^{vii} See: Bevans as above. Aylward Shorter 1989 onward, Schrieter OP 1985, M.P.Gallagher SJ 1997.

^{viii} See David Bosch 1993 p451

^{ix} E.g. See Mercy Amba Oduyoye in *The Way* 1999

^x E.g. See Thomas Merton The two other men I knew were not monks or oblates by intention but they were monks in their unspoken permanent vow of conversion of manners. Merton stated, "The vow of 'conversatio morum' is a vow to live in the Spirit". It is aimed at spiritual virginity which is purity of heart. The point here is that the goal of monastic living is not seeking personal perfection. It is as Merton noted. "Christ is the centre of monastic living. He is the source and the end. He is the way of the monk as well as his goal." In *Basic principles of monastic living*. 1996 Templegate p9