

Jewish temple, in an Ephesian lecture hall, in Corinthian homes.  
<sup>73</sup> The multi-congregational model has forced us to consider more deeply our sociological preconceptions regarding church. We have also been asked to face some of our fears. One is the loss of control. A multi-congregational model probes our levels of relational trust. Can you trust another congregation? What if they grow big enough to vote against you in a church meeting? A multi-congregational model has probed our core values and understandings of church and mission.

**Organisationally**, church life can be considered through the lens of three zones; an emergent zone (coloured green), a pre-formative zone (coloured blue) and a reactive zone (coloured red).<sup>74</sup> Just as individuals are born and grow rapidly (green zone), mature faithfully (blue zone) and age slowly (red zone), so do all organizations. Leadership imagination needs to appreciate, and cultivate, life in all three zones. Multiple congregations have increased Opawa's "green zone" and our capacity to develop leaders and innovate within an organisation that was focused heavily on the "blue" and "red" zones. Such has been the dance of the Triune God among us.

## **Conclusion**

At Opawa, deliberately nourishing relationships between emerging and established has grown our understanding of mission and our appreciation of diversity. We are a richer, deeper and larger church. Thanks be to the Social God, who dances in our world today.

## **AND WHAT DO YOU DO?**

### **Chris Skilton**

*Archdeacon of Lambeth and Board Member of Ministry Today*

Jane is well-known for her skill as a piano player and arranger of music, (which she does semi-professionally); Kevin played football

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<sup>73</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church. A Critical Assessment of the Church in All Its Aspects* (Gill and MacMillan, 1976).

<sup>74</sup> Alan Roxburgh & Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (Jossey Bass, 2006) 40ff.

to a high standard at amateur level; Jason is a primary school teacher whose work a recent Ofsted inspection at his school described as “outstanding”; Millie is a well-organised PA to the company secretary of a small business; Arthur is a senior social worker with a significant case-load of child abuse cases.

All five are members of their local church. In these different areas of expertise, do they possess gifts, or skill or abilities? And how should we distinguish between them? Are they God-given gifts or natural talents? All five have come to Christian faith in the past five years and were exercising these gifts or skills long before they wandered into a church. Should they be playing in the worship band, coaching the youth group football team, teaching in the 11-13s on Sundays, organising the reading and intercessions rota and serving as the church’s Child Protection Officer?

How we answer these questions will depend quite a lot on our theological understanding of the way in which God works in the world; how we understand the concept of the ‘image of God’ in humanity; how we understand what redemption means, and much much more! We are aware that the New Testament has several lists of gifts to be exercised in ministry in the church - I Cor 12, Eph 4, Rom 12 and I Pet 4. None are definitive and none seemingly exclusive. And what about I Cor 13:3 which talks about the gift of martyrdom, although it can only be exercised once! Are these gifts the sole preserve of the Christian? What exactly distinguishes Christian compassion or generosity (Rom 12) from that exercised by a devout member of another faith or someone with no religious belief at all?

Our teaching in church can imply that once a person has become a Christian, God gives them new gifts specifically for Christian service, but what about the ones that you possessed before? The apostle Paul is a good example of the conundrum! After his conversion he received gifts of teaching and evangelism that were key to church planting and were used to transform the nature of the emerging Christian church. Before his conversion, however, he had been schooled in logic, rhetoric and law - skills and abilities that he put to excellent use in his letter-writing.

Definitions don’t necessarily get us far. Jane’s skill in playing the piano was achieved by great dedication and practice and she still has to work methodically and studiously to hone and develop those skills. But it’s no mere mechanical exercise of learning notes and

techniques: she has a feel for music, especially of twentieth century British and French composers, that transforms the pieces by her interpretation of them. She is reluctant to play in the worship band because, although more than technically competent, she doesn't have a feel for that style of music in the same way and finds it hard to interpret it well (in her eyes). Stephen is less musically competent but leads the musicians in the band with a sensitivity and understanding that is appreciated by the congregation. Does this example give some clue to the nature of what it means to be gifted in the life of the church?

Millie is more than happy to organise church rotas. She enjoys doing it and has a flair for it. She approaches people with warmth, good humour and tact and never fails to have lists in place at the right time. In what ways has this 'gifting' been enhanced? Millie would say she does it because she enjoys doing it and it's quite like her job at work - so why shouldn't she do it in church as well?

Jason is regularly asked if he would help with the 11-13s because there is a desperate need for extra help, especially for a man. Jason has regularly turned down the invitation, although he feels guilty for doing so. He says he gives seventy hours a week to school, and when he comes to church, he needs to put his teaching to one side to be able to give of his best in school on Monday. He does, however, play the flute to a reasonable standard and is a little frustrated that there is no opening in the worship group for him to play (they have two flautists already!).

The way in which we ministers handle people in the local church is a complex process. Yes, Kevin does coach the youth group football and he's found himself far more part of the church since he took this on. And no, Arthur, like Jason, needs to separate out work from church, although he's happy to be consulted on points of information or general process about Child Protection.

Taking people seriously and understanding their needs, aspirations and calling, is difficult for a minister in a busy church. But this is not just a job for someone with HR training - it's part of the minister's calling and gifting (or should it be ability and skill?).