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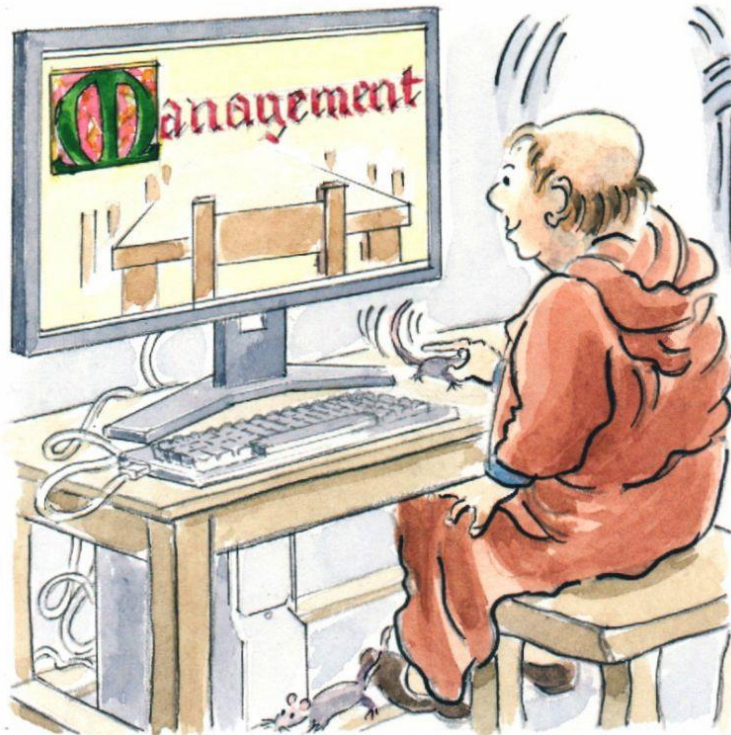
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Managing yourself

Organising your time and your paperwork



**Diocese of St Albans IME2 - 13th July 2019
for clergy and Readers**

1: Two ideas for big picture thinking

The first need is for a clear context for your work and life

You cannot control your ministry and your life if you have no clear context in which you are working. First, others will control it for you. Secondly, you will have no criteria to enable you to plan the detail. Here are two approaches to determining a personal 'big picture'.

Idea 1: Your life seen within a typical planning process

You may be used to ideas of purpose, values, vision, etc. for an organisation, but what about applying them first to you, and secondly to your church(es)? Here is a jargon-proof set of questions (*with some explanation for those who cannot survive without the normal words!*).

- 1 **What do I long to see happen?**
The 'big picture' vision for my life
- 2* **Why am I here?**
The 'purpose' question – but it is worth including negatives
- 3 **What am I aiming to do, and for whom?**
An alternative for Q2
- 4* **What is the distinctive way I go about things?**
This is a 'values' question
- 5 **What is my story so far?**
The need to 'remember', and the value of a personal 'time-line'
- 6* **What might God do through me?**
The main 'vision' question, but actually one of faith and prayer
- 7 **What are the main options open to me as I work towards this?**
This is an issue of making choices
- 8 **What resources do I have and need?**
Internal (eg. health, skills) and external (eg. people, finance)
- 9* **Where do I plan to get to this year?**
This is what I term 'aims' – steps towards the 'vision'
- 10 **What are the stepping-stones towards these points?**
Precise points by date or other measurable feature, what I term 'targets' towards 'aims'
- 11 **Where may I get it wrong?**
A very Christian question to ask at this point
- 12* **Where have I got to?**
The issue of review

* These form the key sequence of purpose, values, vision, aims and review. See Article A4, *Twelve questions to help you plan*, in the Resources section of my website for an application to a church.

Idea 2: Using the Ordinal for both clergy and Readers

Taken from Training Notes TN78, *The role of a church leader*, in the Resources section of my website. See also TN87, *What to look for in your leaders*.

Your role

Your role is to lead God's people in the offering of praise and the proclamation of the gospel.... You are to be a servant and a shepherd among the people to whom you are sent. You are to be a messenger, watchman and steward of the Lord.

Your responsibilities

1 To proclaim the gospel

You are to lead Christ's people in proclaiming the gospel, so that the good news of salvation may be heard in every place.....

2 To baptise new disciples

You are to baptise new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith.

3 To teach the Scriptures

You are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for God's family, With others you are to make clear the Scriptures, to preach the word in and out of season....

4 To lead in worship

You are to preside at the Lord's table and, with others, to lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving....

5 To minister to the world

You are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor and intercede for all in need. You are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death.

6 To foster people's gifts

Guided by the Spirit, you are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith.

7 To stir up your own gift

You are in, the strength of the Holy Spirit, continually to stir up the gift of God that is in you, to make Christ known among all whom you serve....

8 To accept discipline

You are to accept the discipline of this Church and respect authority duly exercised within it and, when necessary and with others, to minister such discipline yourself.

9 To order your life

You are to be diligent in prayer, in reading the Scriptures, and in all studies that will deepen your faith and fit you to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. You are to fashion your own life and that of your household according to the way of Christ....

Remember always with thanksgiving that you are entrusted with the privilege of leading Christ's own flock, bought by the shedding of his blood on the cross. It is to him that you will be accountable for your stewardship of his people.

You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your love of people and your understanding of the Scriptures may grow daily. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

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2: Three key tools to set you free

Only now are we ready for some practical ideas

1: Regular 'planning retreat' or time out

You cannot do this kind of big picture thinking on the job. Most of us need time away from all distractions. Hence the idea of a regular 'planning retreat' of some kind. It is neither a planning day nor a retreat yet it is both of them.

The agenda is to

- REVIEW the past year to see how God has been at work in your life and ministry
- PRAY through this and for wisdom to set a direction for the coming year
- PLAN by going through something like the process on page 1, setting priorities.

It might be:

- A day or part-day away six times a year
- A termly 36-hour event
- An annual week on your own

You may want to use

- A friend's house or a cottage somewhere in the country
- A retreat house of any kind
- Just going out for a long walk not too close to home.

You may want to do this as a staff team – but at some point you need to do it solo.

For further thinking on this, read Training Notes TN54, *Creating space for a Planning Retreat*, on the website.

Resources on my website you might find helpful on today's overall theme

<https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources>

Articles

- A4 Twelve questions to help you plan – *revised into a slightly different context on page 1 above*
 A25 Working from home – boundaries, discipline and space – *see pages 6, 7 in these notes*
 A27 Reliability in ministry – for administrators and leaders
 A36/37 Sorting out your study – the space and the stuff in the room – *see pages 8, 9 in these notes*

Training Notes

- TN7 Ideas for how to make time for life
 TN11 Keeping a time log
 TN23 How to do 'To Do' lists – *see page 4 in these notes*
 TN43 Did Jesus use an iPhone? – essential reading to back up today's material
 TN54 Creating space for a Planning Retreat – *see page 3 in these notes*
 TN57 Clear your clutter!
 TN62 Know what distracts you
 TN67 Stress and the Christian worker
 TN70 Do's and don'ts for a new leader
 TN78 The role of a church leader – *this is the background to page 2 in these notes*
 TN84 How to say 'No' when you should – *see page 5 in these notes*
 TN91 An MOT for disciples of Jesus
 TN106 Talk about taking time 'off'
 TN112 Set my leaders free!

You might also like to follow me on Twitter @johnntruscott.

2: The 'To Do Diary'

I keep coming across people whose 'To Do' lists are causing them extra stress and little practical help. They are misusing this simple tool. To make them work:

- 1 **Differentiate tasks by how long you expect them to take**
Some jobs will take five minutes, others may take several hours. Putting them next to each other on one list is not very sensible.

- 2 **Differentiate tasks by when you need to do them**
Nothing is more demoralising than having a 'To Do' list that never empties. So schedule when you will do things in a realistic way, and then complete your work each day!

- 3 **Differentiate tasks by how important they are**
Have some idea of what will have to drop off if you are too pressed and what must be done whatever happens. Also what could be done by others and what must be done by you. See TN23 on the website for a little more detail on all this.

And hence the idea of a diary rather than the back of an envelope. Here is a page layout that allows you follow all three of the above principles.

A4 or A5 DIARY PAGE Timed engagements (inc timed phone calls, etc.)
Major items of work
Quick tasks to remember
Personal tasks

A system such as this (design one that fits you) helps you not to forget anything that you need to do, ensures you do it on schedule, and allows you to relax. But to complete the picture you also need....

A deadline calendar

This can fit onto a wall planner or a monthly engagement calendar. Take your aims and plan backwards. This is the place to list all those dated targets. So each month builds up what needs to be done then or, more likely, the previous month (so list them then, before the target dates). You can also add in regular deadlines (articles to be submitted, annual items).

For further detail on this idea, see Training Notes TN23, *How to do 'To Do' lists*, on the website.

3: Learning to say 'No' with grace and without guilt

First of all, we need to understand something about expectations placed on us:

- 1: Our own
- 2: The diocese
- 3: Our colleagues
- 4: Our parish
- 5: Our church members
- 6: Our family and friends

Why we may find it so hard to say 'No'

Assess the request

- Listen carefully
- Ask questions
- Activate the pause button
- Give yourself time and space to pray and ponder
- Consult your 'team'
- Beware agreeing to something in the distant future
- Block off activity time in your diary
- Check out alternatives
- Check out the urgency
- Make suggestions for next time

Ask yourself questions of:

- Priority
- Promises
- Time taken
- Completion date
- Enjoyment
- Preventing others
- Hurting others
- Pressure
- Replacement
- Developments

And remember, it is better to say 'No' now than 'Yes' and fail to deliver.

For more on this theme, see Training Notes TN84, *How to say 'No' when you should*, on the website.

3: The challenges of home working

Key issues that make church ministry distinctive

Particular challenges of working from home

Not all of these will apply to everyone today and some will say this is what Christian ministry is all about. Of course, there are *many positives to working on your own from home*. But:

Your space is shared

People invade your home both personally and by phone (and, to a lesser extent, email). This may be couples coming for marriage preparation, church members dropping things in, people coming for church meetings for business or nurture. Ideas to lessen any damage:

It's hard to switch off

There is no commute from home to work and no peace at mealtimes or days off, even if voicemail is on. Reminders of your work are all around you – there is little separation between home life and ministry. Ideas to lessen any damage:

Personal and work admin get muddled up together

Post and email come in for both. It may be a servicing contract for the boiler at the cottage you own or the church boiler. It may be a bill for your holiday or the church weekend. Your study serves both areas. Ideas to lessen any damage:

You are separated from your work colleagues

It is difficult to work as a team when you all work from home, or if others work from church premises and you work from home. You lose the value of daily interaction at the coffee machine. Ideas to lessen any damage:

You may live in a goldfish bowl

Especially if your home is next to the church and visible, people may be only too aware of what washing you put on the line, what time you get up, or when the children are misbehaving. Ideas to lessen any damage:

If single, you can feel very isolated

You come home from an emotionally draining meeting or a difficult funeral service to find no shoulder to cry on, no one who has prepared supper for you, and the housework needs doing and, perhaps, children looking after. Ideas to lessen any damage:

If married with a family, they can feel cheated

They have to be on their best behaviour at home while the Standing Committee meets, and your spouse has to see visitors invading their house and leaving coffee cups for them to wash up afterwards. Ideas to lessen any damage:

If also in employment, you have three pressures

Readers, LLMs and SSMs may find themselves coming 'home' from their employment where 'home' is also a workplace for them. They have to juggle time and thinking between employment/ministry/home all the time. Ideas to lessen any damage:

For more on home working see Article A25, *Working from home*, in the Resources section of my website.

Some possible people-ideas for home-workers

'Employ' specialists

Working alone you lack Specialists who can help you on a project basis. You no longer have an HR or IT department to call on when you work from home. But it is unlikely that you will have expertise in all the areas you need. Some of the obvious ones will be as follows. Some of these people will be volunteers but some could be paid.

IT, social media, email, website

I could not survive without people I can call on to sort out my computer when it plays up, to advise me on software I need, to check my broadband is secure, to purchase new equipment for me when I need it. I have neither the skill nor the time to do this.

Cleaning or gardening

Especially if you live alone and these are not your 'thing'.

Training in your ministry areas

CMD or equivalent is essential if you are to grow in your ministry. You have to invest time in your own training, both for skills but also for spiritual growth, especially if you are continually giving out. The 'experts' here are normally speakers at events to go to.

Meet regularly with an accountability partner

It can be helpful to meet with someone in the same position as you are in, to share difficulties and ideas for solutions, and to pray for each other and any families you have.

You may prefer the idea of a mentor, spiritual adviser, or someone with more experience of working from home in Christian ministry who will listen to you and offer advice.

If married, you may want to work as a couple with other couples in this way as often it can be the spouse who suffers more than you do. You may be revelling in your ministry while they wonder if they signed up for this when they married you.

There are special issues if both members of the couple are ordained. Meeting with another couple in the same position can help – and an external pastor who has permission to ask you both awkward questions at any time can work well.

If single it is important to meet other people not part of your ministry. And in all cases it is NOT weakness to admit you need help. We all do.

Appoint a Responsible Gofer

If you need administrative help (and you will), think not so much in terms of a 'Secretary' who needs to be directed at all times, but of a highly responsible Personal Assistant with initiative who will run errands, take charge of routine work that takes time, and act as an adviser for you. Male or female.

They may need to work from your base, although this poses a range of problems. It is more likely that they will work from their base but undertake some work at yours.

This may be a Parish Administrator but does not have to be. This is a combination of routine (phoning round to rearrange a meeting, sorting the filing out, etc.) and the provider of wisdom in areas where you are weak (devising systems, taking charge of your diary, etc.).

The main need will be flexibility in time week by week, but there can be value in project management skills too such as sorting out the study. But there are also dangers which we might discuss.

4: Mastering deskwork

How to control your desk before it controls you

Four foundations

1 **Affirm your ATTITUDE**

Administration is one of God's creative gifts. It is a real and vital part of our total ministry - we cannot separate 'administration' from 'ministry'; both come from the same word. So let's be positive about desk-work!

2 **Reconsider your ROOM**

Make your study/office as helpful a place to work in as possible: consider furniture (especially chair), equipment to minimise frustration, décor, light and heat. If you use the room for several different purposes, be careful!

3 **Clear your CLUTTER**

We differ on tidiness, but clutter cuts everyone's effectiveness. Clear the room of all that is not necessary, clear the desk every night (or whenever you complete something).

4 **Maximise your MORALE**

We should seek to enjoy desk-work as much as we can. Things that affect *my* morale include the sight and sounds of nature, ticking lists of tasks done, a tidy study. Yours will be different.

Four principles of sorting

5 **SORTING is a vital process**

Pick it up, skim read it, and then decide exactly where it belongs now, so you can work on it when you are ready for it. Avoid the painful disease of reverse piles! If anything can be done in less than two minutes, though, do it. Be disciplined!

6 **BIN / DELETE more than you think you should**

If you rarely find that you have binned or deleted something you now need, you are not throwing enough away. If you are keeping too much, you will not be able to find what you need so easily - and you are back with clutter.

7 **Sort by NEXT ACTION not by the category of the item**

If it is a letter, a reply may not be possible until you have done some research: talked to a colleague, discussed it with a friend or your spouse if married. So what is the first or next thing you need to do with it?

8 **Every item has its own PLACE and ACTION TIME**

Once we place paper away from the desk, we may lose it. So as well as knowing WHERE it belongs, we need a system to determine WHEN we work at it. Sometimes the place we put it in may be enough; often we need a 'To Do Diary'.

Four principles of filing

9 **Your desk is a WORKING SURFACE, not a storage area**

Desks are for working at, not convenient horizontal surfaces for homeless pieces of paper. What proportion of wood is visible on yours?

10 **Think FIND not file**

Most of us think the wrong way round ...and also limit filing to A4 sheets of paper. So think widely for the choice of categorisation, stationery and labelling.

11 **Distinguish HOLDING (permanent and current) from FILING**

This is the idea of a 'working file' - something you expect to need this week. Some will be permanent, some specific projects. You may like to keep these horizontal.

12 **Distinguish STORAGE from FILING**

This is a key to filing success. We simply do not need the speed of access that filing offers for most things we actually file. So clear out the files and put a lot into store.

For a fuller explanation of all these points, read Articles A36 & A37, *Sorting out your study*, on the website. A36 deals with the room itself in much more detail than we have time for today. A37 broadly follows these notes but with a few extra points.

For fuller details on the grippingly exciting topic of filing, see Article A1, *Pass or file?*, though this is now partially superseded by A37. For dealing with clutter, try Training Notes TN57, *Clear your clutter!*