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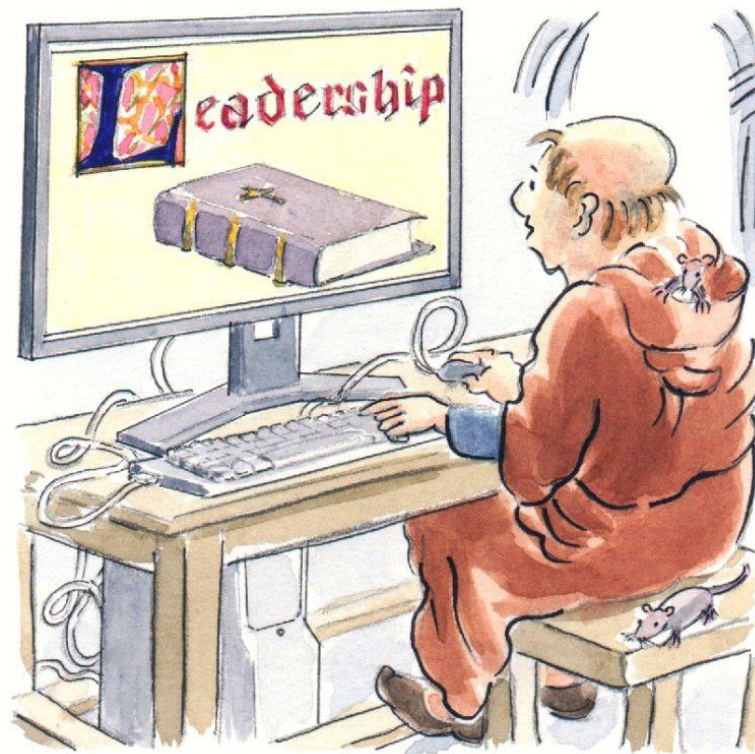
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# Managing the pressure of ministry

*How to be ordained without going under*



**Diocese of St Albans - 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

If you prefer to see these notes on screen, you may access the pdf at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/News> and then the item for today's date.

# Big picture thinking

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

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 possible approaches to determining a personal 'big picture'.

## 1: A typical planning process – but for your life

You may be used to ideas of purpose, values, vision, etc. for an organisation, but what about applying them first to you, and only 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'
- 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 for a church as opposed to you.

Which one or two (no more) of the above questions do you feel you most need to ask now? And why?

**2: Using the Ordinal** Taken from Training Notes TN78 in the Resources section of my website. Here is a second idea, this time for your ministry rather than for your whole life.

## 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 season 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.

*adapted freely from Common Worship Ordination Services © Archbishops' Council 2013*

### 3: A reflection on time

Here are some statements about time management to consider when you have some, er, time. Ponder each one. Take your time to think about each carefully – there really is no hurry!

- 1 Time is the one commodity we all have in exactly equal measure. You cannot add one second to, or subtract one second from, the 86,400 we have each day.
- 2 But life is fragile and none of us has any idea how many more days we have available to us from this moment on. Several famous achievers died at an early age.
- 3 Time is a gift from God. It is a gift we can use, or one we can squander. Those who realise this most are probably those who have been close to death at some point.
- 4 'Time management' is therefore a meaningless idea. Time is fixed. It is our life or ourselves that we manage within the time that we have.
- 5 Some people have expectations as to what they should achieve that are simply not possible. These lead to feelings of guilt and despair. Jesus Christ said that he had finished the work that God had given him, yet thousands remained untaught, unhealed and unfed.
- 6 Once time has been wasted, it is impossible to replay the DVD. This is a subject more of personal discipline than slick techniques.
- 7 Any group will include those with a wide variety of approaches to life and ability to achieve. We are not necessarily wrong, just different (and, often, married to each other!).
- 8 Your own hyper-efficient life-style (if that could describe you) may depress other people who cannot keep up with you. Your very busyness may be a cause of great trouble to them.
- 9 Your own laid-back approach to time-keeping (if that could describe you) may cause others great difficulty (eg. when you miss a deadline they were depending on).
- 10 Scripture tells Christians to live life within the context of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in glory. That is the time context for our discipleship.

**Matthew 6:27** (see No.1 in the list)

*"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"*

**John 17:4** (see No.5)

*"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."*

**Galatians 5:22,23** (see No.6)

*But the fruit of the Spirit is .... self-control.*

**2 Peter 3:10-13** (see No.10)

*...Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ...*

# The stress of church leadership

... but is this the word we ought to use?

## 1: Stress or distress?

Stress is a mechanical word – distress is the medical term we often mean.

- 1 Some stress is essential for health (consider a violin, or human muscles).
- 2 Some stress is creative (consider 'flight', or adrenalin).
- 3 Some stress is not so good. "Our inability to cope (and achieve and find satisfaction) with the demands and expectations placed upon us."
- 4 What is an enjoyable thrill for one person may be real distress for another.

## A balanced life requires

- outputs – to expend energy and challenge us (putting us under right stress);
- rest and recovery (sleep and relaxation);
- recreation (physical, enjoyable, intellectual, spiritual - discipleship);
- routines (daily essentials, care for our relationships – both for singles and marrieds)

How might this apply in ministry?

For an idea of discussing 'time off' with lay leaders, see Training Notes TN106, *Talk about taking time 'off'*, in the Resources section of my website.

## Factors in society that affect levels of distress

- 1 choices (food shopping, liturgical services, etc.);
- 2 change (life used to – we thought – carry on year by year);
- 3 clergy profile (the goldfish bowl in the local community);
- 4 relationships (are far more complicated than once);
- 5 ourselves (personality, experience, relationships, health, mind, spirituality);
- 6 email and social media.

Consider also our partnership with others in the above, our control over each of them, and the timing or multiplicity of such factors.

Study *Holmes and Rahe tables* (Google them) to get an interesting idea of what events supposedly have greatest impact on distress (but don't go into too much detail on the scores). Problems become more obvious when stress in your family added to stress in your parish added to stress in yourself comes to a total greater than you can be comfortable with.

The material in this section is adapted from Training Notes TN67, *Stress and the Christian worker*, in the Resources section of my website.

## **Workplace stressors for a Christian Minister**

Which of these are dangerous for you just now? Some are clear, others more subtle. We can attempt some basic solutions for some of these.

- 1            Open-ended opportunities – no neat boundaries
  
- 2            High levels of emotion - funerals, up-front, conflict
  
- 3            Critics and bullies – the underbelly of congregational life
  
- 4            Secular environment – whether inner-city, suburban or rural
  
- 5            Solo working – no real team to share with, working from home
  
- 6            Long hours with financial pressure – with little escape
  
- 7            High expectations – from different groups of people
  
- 8            An environment of failure – national pressures, falling numbers
  
- 9            Poor management – little real care for many clergy
  
- 10           Sense of inadequacy – colleagues who seem successful
  
- 11           The diocese and parish finance – paying share, keeping afloat
  
- 12           Building issues – maintenance of historical treasures
  
- 13
  
- 14
  
- 15

Where might the idea of spiritual warfare fit? Within the above list or as a separate category? What might that look like?

## 2: Signs of distress

### Ten distress signals from our bodies ... from the top down

- ⊗ Tension headaches or migraines
- ⊗ Dry throat or neck pains
- ⊗ Chest tightness
- ⊗ Breathlessness / sweating
- ⊗ Rapid or erratic or forceful heartbeat
- ⊗ Muscle tension / back pain
- ⊗ Indigestion / wind
- ⊗ Changes in bowel movements
- ⊗ Frequent need to pass urine
- ⊗ Pins and needles in legs or arms

What about you? What affects you most?

### Ten behavioural reactions

- ⊗ Feeling tired and drained
- ⊗ Not sleeping well
- ⊗ Feeling tense, frightened or tearful
- ⊗ Irritable or aggressive with mood swings
- ⊗ Indecisive and complaining
- ⊗ Feelings of failure and unnecessary worry
- ⊗ Change in appetite, libido or menstrual pattern
- ⊗ Increase in drinking, smoking, use of pills
- ⊗ Unable to concentrate for long or low energy
- ⊗ Poor work judgement or accident prone

And you, as before?

### Five spiritual reactions

- ⊗ Lack of desire to pray or read Bible
- ⊗ Feelings of worthlessness and sinfulness
- ⊗ Feelings of guilt and hypocrisy
- ⊗ Wanting to avoid God
- ⊗ Wanting to hide from other Christians

NB: None of these symptoms immediately implies distress. And all anxiety produces these appropriate reactions. They become alarm bells if they go over a limit.

### Possible organisational reactions (study, diary, etc.)

Check out Article A25, *Working from home*, in the Resources section of the website.

### 3: How can you reduce distress?

Apart from any specific solutions we came up with on page 5:

- 1 Understand how God has made you; he loves you as you are. Seek him above all else. Study the Psalms.
- 2 Identify your main ministry stressors and seek ways to minimise them. Write out a plan for how you might achieve this.
- 3 Seek medical or Christian help if you are distressed. This is not weakness.
- 4 Seek to keep morale high, avoiding crises and multiple tasks where possible.
- 5 Improve the working environment as far as you can: nature, tidiness, whatever. A day sorting the study may have a significant impact on your stress.
- 6 Have a life outside the parish, take time to do what you enjoy which has nothing to do with church.
- 7 Value and use your family and close friends. Do not isolate yourself. Take part in some kind of group activity if you live alone.
- 8 Make time for yourself, both body and mind: diet, exercise, sleep, reading. Fall back on to the Sabbath principle. Take proper time off especially if you cannot afford to.
- 9 Structure your day more tightly with fixed times for certain activities. Take a monastic approach to the day.
- 10 Use the tools we shall discuss in the next section of today's event: a planning retreat, a 'To Do Diary', saying 'no', etc.
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14

#### **Biblical stress**

Consider the Gospels. What were the particular stressors that Jesus was living under during his three years of ministry? And what can we learn from how he handled these?



# Key tools to reduce stress levels

Only now are we ready for some practical ideas

## A: 'Planning retreats'

You cannot do this kind of thinking on the job. Most of us need time away from all distractions. Hence the idea of a regular 'planning retreat'. The agenda is to REVIEW, PRAY and PLAN. So:

- A day or part-day away six times a year
- A termly 36-hour event
- An annual few days 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.

If you work best in a team setting, you may want to adjust this idea and go away as a team or with one or two of those you know from your college days. But the key points are that:

- This is neither 'a management session' nor a 'retreat' but a 'planning retreat'!
- It needs to go in the diary early on and not be bullied by more urgent needs.
- You need to go 'away' from your normal environment and from distractions.
- The longer the better – include at least one night away if that is possible.

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

What decision could you take today that will eventually result in your having a planning retreat?

## Resources on my website you might find helpful on today's 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  
 A27 Reliability in ministry – for administrators and leaders  
 A36/37 Sorting out your study – the space and the stuff in the room

### Training Notes

- TN6 The Minister's role in larger churches  
 TN7 Ideas for how to make time for life  
 TN11 Keeping a time log  
 TN23 How to do 'To Do' lists – *see page 10 in these notes*  
 TN40 Appointing a Church Administrator – *see page 12 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 this page!*  
 TN57 Clear your clutter!  
 TN62 Know what distracts you  
 TN67 Stress and the Christian worker – the main website resource on this theme  
 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 11 in these notes*  
 TN106 Talk about taking time 'off'  
 TN112 Set my leaders free!

Ask to come on to my mailing list to inform you of new items. Follow me on Twitter @johnntruscott.

## **B: A monthly calendar**

The idea here is to plan your year month by month.

### **Think 'aims' – specific projects**

Your role is at heart fairly static, but within that context you need specific priorities or aims for each period (say, each year). Most of these will be what you want to achieve by a given date.

If you have clear priorities in life or ministry, where do you need to get to by, say, this time next year? This is bringing the big picture planning down in scale.

Aims change year by year, unlike purpose. They can include ideas of activity, relationships, seasonal issues, personal discipleship. In a parish you might have specific aims you wish to achieve by the time you move on.

My aims for this calendar year

### **Then add dated events throughout the year**

You may have specific deadlines you need to meet at various points in the year. These might include

- Deadlines that are some way ahead: eg. special services or speaking engagements, booking your family holiday, planning your move from curacy.
- Regular activities not to be forgotten: eg. a bimonthly magazine article deadline.
- Monthly/weekly activity that needs to be fitted in: eg. sermon preparation, claiming expenses.

### **And so: a monthly calendar**

This acts as a monthly reminder of out-of-the-ordinary activity. It does not give specific dates (we get to that in a minute) but lists what needs to be done that month.

This is the half-way stage between the big picture priorities for the year and the daily detailed activity. It links the two.

It is NOT putting exact dates on when you do stuff but does show monthly deadlines by when you intend to have it done.

If you feel this might work for you, what is the first action to take on it when you get home?

## C: 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 activities 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.

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

### ... but how are you going to deal with 'interruptions'?

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.

You fill it with daily issues that tell you of things to do, plus the monthly listing on the previous page that needs then to be fed into a daily diary of this kind.

Some clergy tell me that the idea works a treat, but they prefer to work it on a weekly diary basis rather than a daily basis. Fine – find what suits you best.

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

## **D: The art of saying '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 you 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.

## How to say 'No'

- 1 Say something positive first
- 2 Say the actual word 'No'
- 3 Smile
- 4 Never lie but do not give too much away
- 5 Don't over-apologise or feel guilty

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

## E: Ask others to help you

You simply cannot trust yourself alone to conquer this issue. If you are disorganised, you need more motivation than simply thinking you must improve. If you say 'yes' far too much, you will also convince yourself that the next request is one that really does demand another 'yes' from you. So here are some ideas for people to help you. Adapt these to fit the person that is you, and the environment you work in.

### Someone to hold you to an action plan

If you are going to improve, you need to become accountable to someone who is prepared to be tough with you, and to whom you agree to submit. This might be a spouse if you are married, or a close friend who is not frightened to take real action on this. If working from a church office it may need to be a colleague – and you may want to be accountable to each other. But this does have some dangers of course.

### A mentor to advise you

This is not quite the same as the above. Here I have in mind someone who has won this battle before and who can offer advice from a professional angle. So it may be another member of the clergy in the diocese, or it may be one or more people who agree to partner you in your new resolve. Such people do not have to see you physically on a regular basis, but they do need to make you report to them regularly, and take this responsibility seriously.

### Experts

There may be aspects of your work that you can get by on, but which take time and distract you from what should be your priorities. Can you find someone who can sort things out for you when required? Examples might include IT expertise, car maintenance, or someone who can read widely and advise you on what you need to be reading for your work and what can be avoided.

### A Personal Assistant

It is the principle that matters here more than the actual idea (which may not in itself be possible in your situation). Is there someone you can train and to whom you can delegate parts of your work that do not necessarily need your personal attention? If working from home, are there family members who can help out in certain ways (even if just in busy periods)? In an office, can people cover for each other in some way? In either, is there a church member who could work with you in this way: NOT a junior secretary but something more like a third Church Warden?

See also Training Notes TN40 on the website on appointing a Church Administrator.

## **F: Planning for interruptions, pack/unpack, time off**

Interruptions can be what you are in ministry for, or distractions from what you should be doing. It's vital to know the difference! For the latter it helps to state your availability and stick to it, to stand up rather than sit down (in person or on the phone) and have a plan for those who interrupt regularly (especially work colleagues).

### **Interruptions you regard as part of your ministry and accept / welcome**

Budget time for them – these are your ministry

### **Interruptions you feel you must manage and deal with in other ways**

Many clergy leave little planned time for event preparation and none for unpacking afterwards.

### **Pack and unpack time needs to go in the diary for every event**

But one of the biggest killers is the lack of time 'off', daily, weekly and annually. Issues to consider:

- 1 Location – especially when the home is the workplace
  
- 2 Length of time – the evening before the day, a two-week break once a year
  
- 3 Emails, phone, social media – is it right to do screen work on holiday?
  
- 4 The value of rhythm in daily life – consider the monastic life

Refer back to p3 and see Training Notes TN106, *Talk about taking time 'off'*, in the Resources section of my website.

### **Every Christian worker needs to study and apply the Sabbath principle**

# Action plan

So what are you going to do about it?

The main lessons I have learned today

Some new ideas which I have picked up today

The main actions I need to take now as a result of today

The people I need to talk to in connection with this

The time I shall set aside (within one week) to review my notes and plans

My target for achievement by July 2020

Visit my website at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk> and see the Resources section for various items (downloadable without charge) relevant to today's theme. Ask to come on to my mailing list so you receive notification of new items six times a year.