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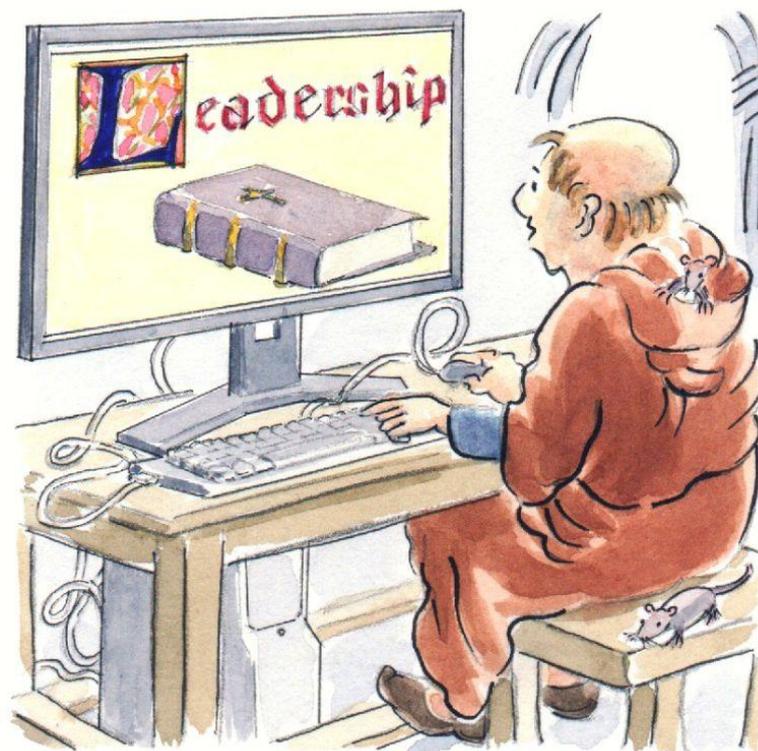
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Managing yourself

Organising your life and ministry



St Albans Diocese IME2 online - 11th July 2020

These notes are in the day's Dropbox folder but also available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/News> and then the item for St Albans Diocese.

Introduction: Four aspects of your life

How do you fit them together?

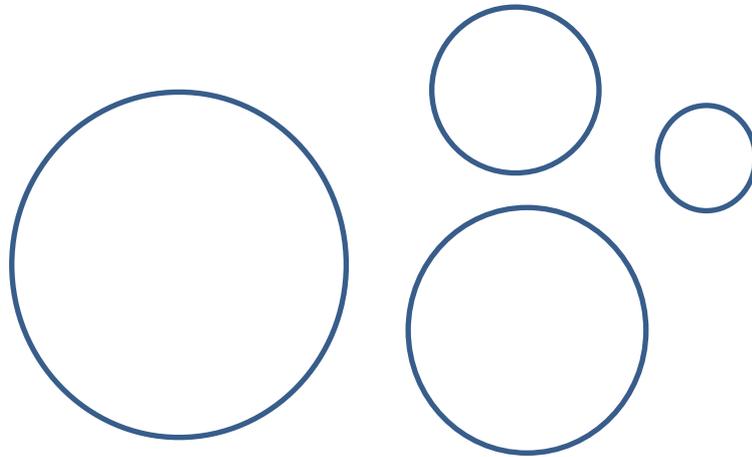
Welcome to this morning's sessions, whether you are a Curate or a Reader, on how we manage ourselves. This year this has to be online which restricts what I can do a bit, but I hope these notes will give you a background for what I say and what we all discuss. Kate Peacock will be leading the session on stress this afternoon. That will be great and, no doubt, much more technically brilliant than this will be. But I hope what we cover this morning will lead to a lowering of anxiety levels in your life and ministry.

Our first session is all about big picture thinking because that is the foundation you need for all that follows. The second session will offer some tools that I have found work well with Christians in ministry.

There are lots of back-up materials in the **Resources section of my website**, all of which are available to you without charge. You will find the main index page at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources>.

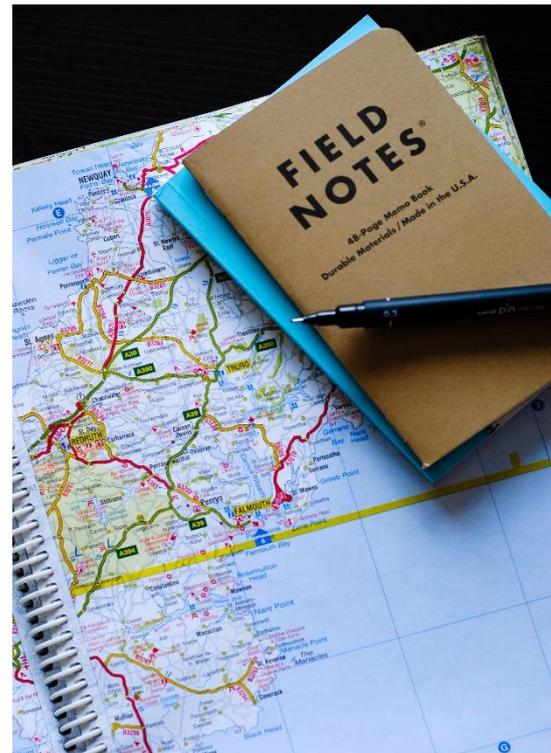
But let's start with four circles. We label them

- **Your life** (yourself, your history, your family and friends)
- **Your ministry** (as Curate or Reader)
- **Your discipleship** (as a follower of Jesus Christ)
- **Your employment** (only add a fourth circle if you *also* have a paid job to do as SSM, Reader, etc.)



Your task is to draw three (or four) circles in the space below to represent each of these, choosing appropriate sizes for the circles and an appropriate layout where the circles exist separately, overlap, or fit within each other in some way. What exactly the circles you draw represent is entirely up to you. This is an issue of how you perceive yourself and there is no right answer as such. You might like to return to this at the end of our sessions this morning.

Two pictures to hold in mind



Most of us deal with church ministry or our own life as though it was an Ordnance Survey map. This shows a relatively small area in considerable detail.

So in church we plan the coming week's services, next Saturday's event, today's diary engagements. We deal with what has come in to our Inbox overnight, or our social media timeline. That is all fine. We need to do this.

But to find our way to the detail we need a road atlas. This covers a broad area but only in an outline. The detail is missing but the overall picture is there. It puts the detail in context.

In church life we too rarely look at the road atlas. We are so busy with the Ordnance Survey stuff that we easily neglect to check out the year's plan, the priorities we need to set and adhere to, and purpose of why we are here, the ministry that God has called us to.

So, currently, how we restart worship in our church buildings is Ordnance Survey. What 'church' will look like in the future is road atlas.

But we cannot plan our days until we understand our years. We are in danger if we stay in Ordnance Survey mode when we need to be working from the road atlas.

Our first main theme today is road atlas. Only when we understand the big picture can we then turn our attention to the detail. Otherwise we shall be swept off our feet by the urgent and neglect the important.

Is this a danger for you?

A: Two ideas for big picture thinking

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

You cannot control your life and your ministry 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'.

A1: 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 ***your life***, and only secondly to your church(es) ministry? Here is a jargon-proof set of questions.

- 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.

Ponder: Which one (or two) of the above questions do you feel you most need to ask now? And why?

A2: Using the Ordinal – for your ministry

Here is a second idea, this time for **your ministry** rather than for your whole *life*. This applies to Readers as much as to Clergy.

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

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*.

Groups

Share which aspect of the Ordinal you feel to be the most challenging one *for you* just now, whether you are a Curate or a Reader. Why this one?

Would you want to change the order of the main headings taken from the Ordinal and if so to what and why?

What one action do you now want to take to apply this session (A1 and A2) to your life and ministry?

What does your four-circle diagram look like and would you want to change it at all after this session? To what and why?

We have already taken the idea of an Ordnance Survey map. Here's another picture to consider. How do you put the pieces together without the picture on the box?



A3: 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 ...

Ponder: a short time to be silent and reflect on God's gift of time.

B: Five key ideas to set you free

Only now are we ready for some practical ideas

B1: '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.

Together We find out who has something like a Planning Retreat (note this is not just a normal Retreat) and ask them how it has helped them in life and ministry.

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 3 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 8 in these notes
 TN40 Appointing a Church Administrator
 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 4 in these notes
 TN84 How to say 'No' when you should – see page 10 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 @johnvtruscott.

B2: A monthly calendar

The idea here is to plan your year month by month. This then feeds into the To Do Diary (B3).

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.

Every aim will then need specific actions to help bring it about: thinking time, writing time, praying time, planning time. These will all need to fit into a monthly calendar.

My aims for this calendar year and the kind of actions they will need

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.

B3: 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. 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. This is an A4 or A5 diary page.

Timed engagements (inc timed phone calls, etc.)
Major items of work
Quick tasks to remember
Personal tasks (or amalgamate in the above)

... 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 next 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.

Pack and Unpack time

One element to include in your To Do Diary is that of either Pack or Unpack time. Every activity or meeting needs preparation (pack) and then time to put everything back where it belongs or ready for action (unpack). If you omit this from your diary you are soon in trouble.

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

Groups

Share details of apps that different people use to help diarise not only appointments but work too, both major and minor reminders. Some Ministers find it better to do a 'To Do Diary' by week rather than by day. Does anyone do this and with what impact?

How might the idea of pack and unpack time work out for each of you? Give examples and work out what each of these might mean in practice.

B4: The art of saying 'No' with grace and without guilt

First, 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



Ponder 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

Groups

Why do each of you find it hard to say 'No'? What can you do to help each other assess when you might be right to say 'No'?

See if one person can cite an actual example where they might in future need to say 'no', and let the rest of the group act as consultants to help them see how they might go about this.

B5: Know and deal with your distractions

We are all easily distracted, especially from those long and difficult tasks such as a major writing project or sermon preparation. The reasons why this is particularly relevant for clergy:

- 1 Lack of **natural discipline and accountability** for those who work largely on their own or outside a normal management structure.
- 2 Little **effective support and encouragement** for much of Christian ministry.
- 3 High **expectations from different parties**, and criticism or conflict when not met.

What can you do for yourself and others to minimise these? Here are 20 distractions:

Working from home

Friends and family / pets / jobs to do / food and drink

Messages

Telephone / electronic messages / post / unplanned visitors

Seeing and listening

Radio, TV, computer / internet / books, magazines / others in your view

Administration

Key-holders / untidiness / business / delaying jobs

Worry

External nuisance / lack of peace / poor health / responsibility

For fuller details of this list and some positive ideas, read Training Notes TN62, *Know what distracts you*, on the website. And for a detailed exploration for home-workers, Article A25, *Working from home*.

Books you may find helpful

Secular books – there are many but three that many Christian workers have found helpful are:

Getting things done by David Allen published by Piatkus

Do it tomorrow by Mark Forster published by Hodder

Clear your desk! by Declan Treacy published by Arrow Business Books

Books by Christians – some of the best are well out of print by now but here is a selection of in print books written from a variety of angles:

Sustaining leadership by Paul Swann published by BRF

Beyond busyness by Stephen Cherry published by Sacristy Press

Zeal without burnout by Christopher Ash published by Good Book Company

Action plan

So what are you going to do about it?

Time on your own to plan

The main lessons I have learned in this material

Some new ideas which I have picked up

The main actions I need to take now as a result

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 Christmas 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.