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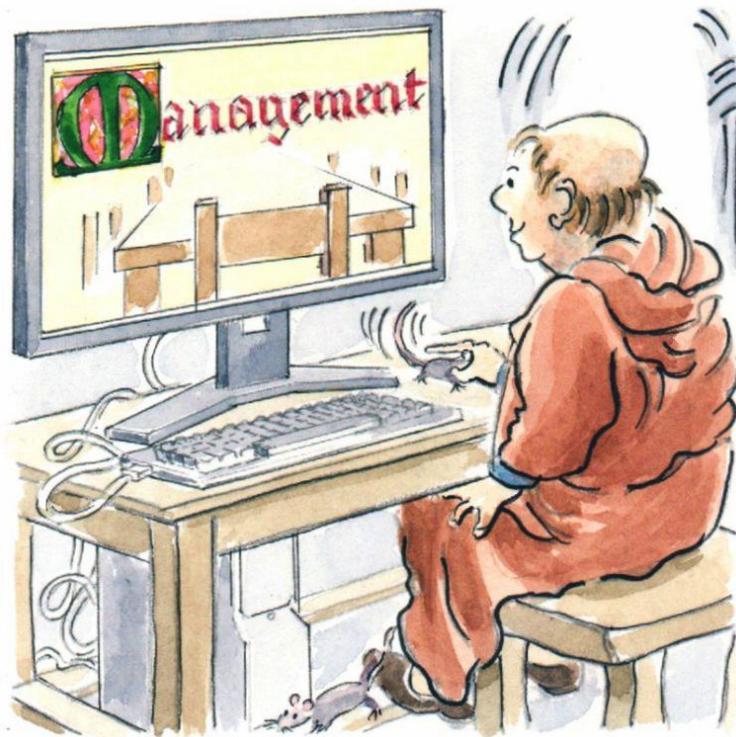
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How to have a healthy diary

Is it possible to be ordained and still have a life?



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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.

1: Two ideas for 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'.

A: 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.

Which one of the above questions do you feel you most need to ask now? And why?

B: Using the Ordinal – for your ministry

Here is a second idea, this time for your ministry rather than for your whole life.

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, sentinel 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*.

Which one of the above points do you feel you most need to work on now? And why?

2: Four key tools to set you free

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 IME/POT group. 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 this 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
 A27 Reliability in ministry – for administrators and leaders
 A36/37 Sorting out your study – the space and the stuff in the room
 A51 The 'To Do Diary' guide – how to use this simple tool

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 5 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!*
 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 6 in these notes*
 TN106 Talk about taking time 'off'
 TN112 Set my leaders free!
 TN132 What you look for in your Minister

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

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 curacy you might have specific aims you wish to achieve by the time you move on. So a set of three year aims would be fine.

My curacy aims

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 'To Do' 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.

C: The 'To Do Diary' for your days

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. I separate out into **Main Tasks** (probably 45 mins+) and **Quick Actions** (probably less than 30 mins).
- 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! Hence: use a **diary** so each item has a date.
- 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.)
Main Tasks
Quick Actions
Personal tasks – <i>or integrate these in the lists above</i>

- 4 You need to know how to deal with 'interruptions'.**
Never fill each day in advance without thought to what may be unexpected. Your ministry is, in some ways, to be available. So allow enough space for this.
- 5 You need to diarise 'Pack' and 'Unpack' time**
Every event needs to be prepared, and unpacked afterwards. Block out times for this.

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 for a quick outline and Article A51, *The 'To Do Diary' guide*, for a detailed explanation of how to use this simple tool.

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. For when you eventually move to your first living, you might find Training Notes TN70 helpful, *Do's and don'ts for a new leader*. Also TN132, *What you look for in your Minister*.