

Diocese of Rochester

Administration as a Spiritual Gift

Administration is Spiritual? Surely not!

1 Cor 12:27-28 is a well known passage and says the following:

*'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has **appointed** first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, **those with gifts of administration**, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.'*

Often as Diocesan Treasurer I think that there is more to this role than just a job, that there is a spiritual dimension to it, and that our faith helps us in our work. We are all involved in building up the Church and although doing the 'admin stuff' is not thought of as being glamorous or rewarding, those of us who do the administration frees up others to do different work for the Kingdom.

I hope that these notes help those of us in the church fulfill our roles better whether we are a PCC member, Secretary, Treasurer, Church Administrator or we carry out some other support role. Maybe even those in leadership should read it to understand it from their end as well!

Of course the word in the original Greek text that we have translated as 'administration' leans more towards 'governance' and 'leadership' than about 'paper-pushing'. However, the list of gifts in 1 Cor 12 does include 'those able to help others'. So for the benefit of this paper we are thinking of those who not only are involved in a leading but perhaps office-based role, as well as someone who is 'helping' by running the coffee rota!

We may think Administration is a chore, God thinks otherwise

Administration gets a bad name from us. It's boring, frustrating, and time-consuming. The correspondence to respond to, the rotas to sort out, the arranging of events we have to do. All this is to be completed as soon as possible so we can get on with the more spiritual stuff. Thankfully God sees it differently.

The spiritual 'gift of administration' is the ability to turn God-given vision into reality. The word administration comes from the Latin and literally means 'to' (ad) 'minister'. To administer is to do ministry. Paul lists it as one of the crucial gifts for building up the church so it must have been thought of as being quite crucial. The Spirit equips us with the ability to make things happen and to help church-life flourish. So let's

not belittle it; it is hugely important and an active part of what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst.

Look at the story of the early church in Acts 6. Thousands have started to follow Jesus and some things have begun to get out of hand. The leadership decides it needs some help with practical arrangements – the church is in desperate need of administrators. So they appoint people known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, people like Stephen, a man referred in Acts 6:8 as being ‘full of God’s grace and power’ who ‘did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people’. (I don’t know whether we should draw any other conclusions, but it is interesting to note that only a few verses later and Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr).

They understood the vital importance of God-anointed administration to making things work, and so they put the best people on the job. The qualification was being filled with the Holy Spirit, because they understood the spiritual nature of such practical work.

What a privilege it is for us to serve in Jesus’ ‘administration’! We are carrying out work as part of a team to build up the Kingdom of God. We serve someone infinitely more powerful than any of the rulers of this world. But to serve Jesus is more than a role or a job description. As we offer our time in his service, we find ourselves alongside him as co-workers.

So who can we get inspiration from?

There are a variety of biblical characters we can get inspiration and encouragement from.

Joseph

Genesis chapters 41 – 47 tell the story of Joseph in Egypt during the years of plenty and the years of famine. Joseph was the individual chosen by God who was the only one who could interpret Pharaoh’s dreams despite Pharaoh trying others first (Gen 41:8). As a result of Joseph’s spiritual discernment Pharaoh appointed Joseph as overseer for Egypt (Gen 41:39 – 43).

With Joseph’s planning (and spiritual insight into what was going to happen) they were able to store up the excess from the years of plenty to help them in the years of famine (Gen 41:48 – 49, 56). And it was not just Egypt that suffered, but other countries around, but because of Joseph’s administration, Egypt led the way in surviving the famine (Gen 41:57).

Nehemiah

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to king Artaxerxes in the Persian court. He is so concerned for his people in Jerusalem that for four months he continues to grieve

and pray over the situation (Neh 1:4). When the opportunity comes he has a practical plan to put to the king (Neh 2:4 – 6).

Nehemiah's plans are accepted and he has documents prepared for safe passage and to provide initial materials (Neh 2:7 – 9). Nehemiah inspects the city in secret to formulate what needs to be done (Neh 2:11 – 16). The work required is shared; all sorts of people join together in the work of rebuilding. Nehemiah even gets people to work on sections nearest their homes as bit of local incentive (Neh 3). They have a dynamic leader/organizer; even when they face opposition Nehemiah has a secondary plan to get them to pray and to set a guard (Neh 4:9). The work was completed in 52 days and even those opposed to it had to acknowledge the Lord's hand in it all (Neh 6:16).

Can we fix it? Yes we can!

Stephen

Referred to above, but appointed with six others by the early church to administer the distribution of food to widows (Acts 6:1 – 6). The appointment of these seven enabled the other apostles and early church leaders to 'prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:3). It was important for them to segregate the work *for the furtherance of the Kingdom*. We don't all have to be involved in everything, we can concentrate on specific areas of work, but we do need to be 'known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom' (Acts 6:3) so we can carry out our tasks as God-inspired administrators.

And what happens if there is a lack of administrative support?

Administration support is essential:

'Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?' (Luke 14:28)

It is essential for there to be planning in undertaking any event. Who fleshes out the detail from any plans? The administration team! Indeed, it might even be the administrators who devise the plans in the first place!

In Exodus 35 and 36 we read that the Israelites had a brilliant designer and appeal director in Moses for the building of the sanctuary, and there were skilled craftsmen in Bezalel and Oholiab to carry out the work. But he didn't have an appeal administrator. So the people kept on bringing offerings, until Bezalel and Oholiab couldn't cope with it all, and had to tell Moses to get the people to stop (Ex 36:4 – 7). If there had been an appeal administrator it may have made life easier for the craftsmen, and taken some of the load off Moses.

Motto, if you are having an appeal, get someone to administrate it so that you know how the appeal is going, and they can inform you when you reach your targets.

If we are in an administration role how should we think?

At the outset we should consider everything we do prayerfully. Perhaps dedicating to the Lord anything we need to deal with. I was challenged once by someone who before answering the telephone or opening letters always prayed for wisdom as to how to handle the situation he was about to face. Is that too much of a challenge?

Administrators need to have the highest ideals in approach, in planning, a servant heart and a Christ-like attitude. Possibly a good listening ear and lots of patience! (for when Mrs Brown complains – again – about something trivial...)

'...in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work' (2 Cor 9:8) and, *'this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God'*. (2 Cor 9:12).

The following practical points might help us:

1. Understand your faith

You cannot separate the spiritual from the practical.

Understand the 'servant ministry' of administration as it serves all other ministries and see it as the gift of Jesus Christ to his church.

Be enthusiastic – it may not be frontline, but it is given for the health of the Church.

2. Do not be afraid to ask 'why?'

Keep asking 'why', not 'how'. Good administrators ask this all the time: 'why do we do this?' 'why do we have this committee?'

What are you aiming to achieve?

3. Make lists

Making lists helps clarify issues. Lists of items, categories, tasks, events etc.

Use creative thinkers or work where you can 'think outside the box'.

Have vision – take risks – don't compromise just for acceptability.

Rank your lists and make priorities. As some things will matter more, others will matter less.

What matters in God's plan? Jeremiah 29:11 says *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"*.

Agree on shared values.

4. Put yourself in other people's shoes

Try to see things from their perspective, not just yours. They will have a different view of the matter from you.

In reaching out to those outside the church, ask those outside! Don't think that fellow-Christians have all the answers.

Understand who you are – strengths, weaknesses, personality.

Watch the reaction from people and adapt your message if necessary.

5. The 3 'P's – Past, Present and Predictions

Learn from the **past** – but don't be enslaved to it.

Analyse the **present** to assess it.

Dream dreams for the future (**predictions**). Ask - 'what if?'

6. Be realistic about resources

Assess what is available, especially people and time. Don't try to do too much or more than you can. Churches can expect too much.

Never let finance dictate mission. Budgets are about what you believe God wants you to do, not what is in the bank, but count the cost and be wise!

Never be afraid to say 'no' or, 'stop'.

Know the standards you are working to, but also the expectations and resources.

7. Do not be frightened to plan

Christians should seek God's plans and work within them.

Learn from biblical planning – before the foundation of the world, the plan of salvation etc.

Set clear aims and targets to achieve those aims.

Pray first, plan second; not the other way round!

Don't be afraid to review and to assess past performance.

8. Aim for simplicity

However complex, seek a simple solution.

Be a pilgrim church – pilgrims avoid unnecessary 'baggage'.

Be prepared to change at short notice – complex institutions find it hard to change direction.

Look outwards, not inwards – don't tie people up in your own internal machinery.

Simple administration keeps the focus on the real mission – administration is a means to help achieve the mission God has given, not the mission itself.

How can support be given for those in this ministry?

Do we acknowledge those fulfilling this role? Do we say thank you when things go well? Or do we just criticise if (for example) someone hasn't updated the coffee rota or arranged for the leaders of the prayers at our services?

Firstly we should pray for them and uphold them for what we do. For those who like formal prayers a selection of possible prayers is shown in the appendix.

Secondly we should support and encourage them in the role that they carry out.

Why not lay hands on them? Perhaps at a service of dedication. It doesn't need to be just for those in 'higher' ministries.

Look out for others who might have this gifting. Not just those who can 'get things done' but those who have a servant heart and a Christ-like approach.

Summary

'I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.' (John 15:15)

So next time you find yourself trapped under an avalanche of letters, budgets, service plans or diocesan forms, lift your head high and remind yourself that you're administering for the King, whose 'service is perfect freedom' and who, in His love for you, thinks of you as a friend, not a servant.

Martyn Burt
Diocesan Treasurer
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Notes

All biblical references taken from the New International Version

Thanks to John Truscott for use of some of this material, see for example Training Notes TN4, TN21, TN40 in the Resources section of his site at www.john-truscott.co.uk

Some suggested formal prayers for Administrators

Guide us Lord, in all our doings with your gracious favour, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name, and by your mercy attain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to labour and not to seek for rest, to toil and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Father of mankind, who gave your only begotten Son to take upon himself the form of a servant and to be obedient even to death on a cross: give us the same mind that was in Christ Jesus that, sharing his humility, we may come to be with him in his glory; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people; that each in his vocation and ministry may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have broken the tyranny of sin and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts whereby we call you Father. Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service, that all mankind may be brought to the glorious liberty of the sons of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty Father, whose Son Jesus Christ has taught us that what we do for the least of our brethren we do also for him; give us the will to be the servant of others as he was the servant of all, who gave up his life and died for us, but is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Pour out your Spirit on us Lord, that as we serve you in our church, you will equip us and empower us to work diligently as you would lead us, so that we can help further the work of your kingdom in this place, to the glory of your name. **Amen.**