

***The Leadership of Hope***  
***for the Ministry of Reconciliation:***  
***Diakonia as Leader in a Context of Chronic Anxiety***

Introduction

I do not stand here with a bibliography or a set of solutions or programmatic suggestions. I think, rather, my job here is to offer a sort of prolegomena or preface to help to set the stage for *your* discernment.

Here was my process: in the absence of immediate insight, I went to the shelf of books I amassed some recent-ish time ago. It was a time when I found myself frustrated in ministry (has anyone here ever experienced such?) by conflicting mandates, lack of clarity about directions to follow, conflict in various circles, not sure of my own voice anymore, and I resolved to stop complaining and stop being ‘stuck’ and to do something.

So I gobbled up the Harvard Business Review Leadership books on Strategy, on Collaboration, on Communication. And some church leadership stuff. Helpful stuff, and when I went back to that shelf, I was reminded of how much I’ve learned and how much I have yet to learn.

But next, I recalled the subsequent frustration I had experienced when putting new skills to work didn’t immediately fix everything and I still couldn’t find clarity amongst competing voices outside and inside of myself.

It was then that I realized the extent to which I was caught up in and contributing to the maintenance of anxious systems.

A long while later, I went on sabbatical.

The rest and detachment from office was restorative, but something else was transformative.

When you remove the busy-ness, you can make space for what you love. And sometimes one can recover and tend to those foundational loves.

Sabbatical – and weekly sabbath, truly – makes the space to let your loves lead. And, even more fundamentally, to receive the Holy One who *leads* by first loving us.

It’s simple stuff of ongoing conversion, isn’t it? Simply put, when I made space to follow what my heart yearns for (in my case it was family and music and scholarly

work in theology that I'd long forgotten was a big part of me) – following those loves opened the way, in a soul-deep, bone-deep way, for the Holy One whose call is a laying-claim to leadership over my life.

I can't say that the effects of sabbatical solved everything I had experienced as problems.

I *can* say that this particular conversion turn and reminder helped me to re-centre and to self-differentiate enough to be able to discern better where and to what to give my energies, what to let go, and to be a bit more attuned to and attentive, bluntly put, the distinctions amongst the voices I ought to listen to and those not so much so.

A sabbath image that I'm playing with right now is of Sabbath as a kind of settling into a resonance chamber for God's heartbeat.

Unpacking sabbatical, and the seasons leading up to it, led me to leave the leadership skills books on the shelf, and ask, more fundamentally, "Leadership *for what?*"

And so in what follows I'm going to explore

1. The *For What* of God's mission of reconciliation and how it calls upon the whole Body to lead
2. Some of the dynamics of a time of chronic anxiety
3. The necessary reconciliation of leadership for leadership in reconciliation
4. The leadership of diakonia in lament and hope

## Leadership ‘for what’?

Seminars in effective corporate and political leadership can and do teach important skills.

But skills are only as important as the reason for their employment. For what purpose? Sustainability? Growth? Political power for its own sake? (I’m from Ontario. I’m in shock and grief).

What happens when we think of leading not as presidency over,  
but as *going first*

For us, God goes first.

God has first created.

God has first loved.

God has first called.

God has first chosen.

God has gone before us, already pouring God’s redeeming and healing power into the world.

And God first is the answer to the Why, the For What.

First things first: God has cast creation, and has drawn us into God’s own self, reconciling us into the very life of the Spirit-fired, Cross-shaped, Love-sowing Trinity.

God has made us reconciled into God’s own heart, and as God’s heart is love poured out for the world, we are caught up in that flow.

As people whom God has reconciled with each other, we are, and we are always becoming, a reconciling people.

This is *who* we are.

This is the gift of identity we celebrate and enact in baptism.

The identity that is belonging to God and belonging to each other.

The identity, or *being-ness* of longing for God and longing for each other.

The paradoxical identity of being at once poured out and filled by and for God's purposes, both in the same instance.

Now, skills development and learning of habits and disciplines for getting things done well, I know, these are all important things.

Don't get me wrong. I've seen enough leadership in all sorts of places across our church that has been rather in need of some tutelage, particularly in myself.

But no amount of training and strategic innovation of our models of leadership are worth anything if we aren't immersed in this fundamental of what our centre of gravity is,

of Who and Whose we are as creatures

Creatures called, pulled, drawn into the very Life of God and thrust, driven, propelled into the very Heart of God that is beating steadily in the Land and Lives around us.

And that's our baptismal identity and the baptismal ministry into which we are all called and poured out.

Context: a Culture of Chronic Anxiety... ... poured out into...?

I've been paying attention to matters of theological education and formation for ministry for almost 30 years and for all of that time one of the cries has been "how do we educate and form leaders for a church and context that we have no clue what it will be in 10 years? 5 years?"

The cry expresses a concern that sometimes mounts to anxiety.

And out come the predictors and the modellers of possible future scenarios. All important.

But the more I've seen the barometer needle move every whichway, the more I'm convinced that the only thing that can be predicted is that the societal culture of chronic anxiety is not going away any time soon.

We are poured out in grace and peace for God's work of reconciliation in particular contexts.

One aspect of participation in God's mission is the call to remove what blocks the flow of God's grace in the world.

In the mix of sin-blocks are societal-cultural contextual forces that we sometimes aren't all that aware. Chronic systemic anxiety is one of those blocks.

A few months ago, Church Publishing released a tenth anniversary edition of Edwin Friedman's book "*Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix.*"

I'm tempted to end here by telling you all just to go out and buy it, but I wouldn't have been earning my keep. But do go look for the book.

Friedman was one of the pioneers in Family Systems theory and analytical practice, and he moved between family therapy and working with political, corporate, and social service leaders, to help leaders to self-differentiate within the complex systems that often work to subvert the very leadership they need. (Note that I've edited this down for this context).

Self-differentiation, in a nutshell, is about how to be person-in-right-relationship with one's own self and others, maintaining healthy 'self' without collapsing either into individualism or a 'herding' enmeshment 'group-think.'

Chronic anxiety in a society and culture works against this.

Characteristics of Chronic Anxiety in Families and American Civilization and their  
Major Effects on Leadership

(Context: political leadership)

<b><i>Reactivity</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• automatic responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uproars over perceived slights</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• boundary erosion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bureaucratic entanglements</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exaggeration of extremes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>ad hominem</i> retorts</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loss of resiliency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• disruption, interference, and censorship of opposition</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Effect on Leadership: Leaders become less imaginative, are eventually worn down and resign or ‘go through the motions’</i></b></p>	
<b><i>Blame Displacement</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loss of integrity and accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anti-incumbency</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fault projected outside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• litigiousness and violence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quickness to blame</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on safety rather than adventure</li> </ul>	
<p><b><i>Effect on Leadership: The least mature are selected while those with the greatest integrity, precisely those who have the best capacity to pull a society out of a regression, do not even seek office</i></b></p>	
<b><i>Quick-Fix Mentality</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low pain threshold</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drug culture/escapism/distraction</li> </ul>

• simple answers	• fundamentalism and reductionism
• vulnerability to snake-oil fads	• proliferation of data
• quest for certainty	• emphasis on technique
<b><i>Effect on Leadership: Leaders are not challenged to grow</i></b>	

Table 3. Overview of the Connection between Chronic Anxiety, Its Perversion of Evolutionary Principles, and the Regressive Effects of Counter-Evolutionary Forces on Both Society and Leadership

<b>Chronic Anxiety</b>	<b>Principle Perverted</b>	<b>Effect on Society</b>	<b>Effect on Leaders</b>
reactivity	regulation of instinct	inhibition of self-differentiation	perspective on leadership clouded
herding	adaptation to strength	organization around immaturity	indecisiveness
blaming	response to challenge	disintegration	sabotage
quick-Fix Mentality	maturation takes time	recycled stuckness	least mature selected

Cardinal Suenens, one of the leaders in Vatican II, famously said that “the church is called to ensure that *we* do not block the flow of God’s grace in the world.”

I urge us all to examine our selves and our ways of being in community and in communion with a careful eye to how we ourselves might be caught up in ways of chronic anxiety.

“This book ... is about leadership in the land of the quick fix, about leadership in a society so reactive that it cannot choose leaders who might calm its anxiety. It is about the need for clarity and decisiveness in a civilization that inhibits the development of leaders with clarity and decisiveness. It is for leaders who have questioned the widespread triumphing of data over maturity, technique over stamina, and empathy over personal responsibility. And it is for anyone at all who has become suspicious of the illusions of change – suspicious of the modern fashion wherein solutions, as well as symptoms, burst upon us in every field of endeavor... and then disappear as unexpectedly as they had first appeared, only to be supplanted by the fad of another ‘issue’ or cure, sending everyone back to square one.” (Friedman, 2017, pp 2-3)

The value, here, is on self-differentiated, healthy, mature, leadership. For us, that means not merely knowing oneself, but knowing oneself-in-God.

The need is for self-differentiation in relationships that is radically NOT individualism.

In our anxious culture there seem to be only two choices: competitive and isolating individualism or herding and enmeshment, with nothing in the middle.

Standing over and above each of these, we proclaim the paradox of personhood in communion.



## Leadership in time of Chronic Anxiety - Who & What Focus (how?) ?

Baptismal ministry consists of three distinct “persons” inhabiting the one mission that is God’s mission.

These “persons” are mutually interdependent and are bound together in love. They are *diakonia*, *episcopate*, and *hieros*.

As community of the baptised we are *all* called *together* to support God’s loving redeeming of the world in these three distinct ways:

by loving service that pays preferential attention to the suffering and vulnerable, for the integrity of our ministry in God’s mission;

by teaching that keeps us in communion through time (historically) and space (geographically), tending to the whole of the Body for the integrity of our ministry in God’s mission;

and by anamnesis that draws our attention to the presence of God’s grace, the holy, in the mundane of bread, wine, and our lives, for the integrity of our ministry in God’s mission.

We each and all participate in diakonia, hieros, and episcopate, and we do so both personally and as the one body.

It’s no coincidence that there is a Trinitarian pattern here.

But what we so often do is to fall into a sort of economic trinity in delineating particular ministry responsibilities.

As though only some are called to diakonia, only bishops exercise episcopate, and those in ‘free order’ (laity) can’t exercise hieros.

At worst expression – and we all know too well what these sorts of things feel and look like – deacons might be deployed on the understanding that they alone are the ones to do the social work and the justice work, bishops as though they’re the only ones empowered to make any decisions, and priests as though only they can “make the ordinary holy” (as it were).

And as though the corporate expression of three-fold ministry is only the sum total of the particulars – want to see what total ministry looks like, well, that means you have to have a sum of deacons, priests, and bishops in the room.

Oh, and a few lay people to keep us real and remind us from time to time that there's a world out there.

(By the way, "Laity" poor word. Playing with those in free order and those in bound order)

And this kind of compartmentalizing too easily leads to other sorts of spiritual compartmentalizing, and before you know it, our very communal life begins to sabotage our ability to keep God's mission in focus. And we need to listen to Cardinal Suenens again.

What would it look like to have a fuller reconciled ministry of the whole body?

## Back to Leadership

If we are serious about being the reconciled people gathered and sent into God's reconciling love into the world, we might do well to rest for a bit and inhabit the imaginative space in which we can think about the leadership of diakonia.

I say this in part because of the relative symbolic absence of deacons in our church and the necessity of turning a spotlight in this direction.

And it's not in any way to suggest that the freely-ordered, priests and bishops have their – remember, also equally important and all mutually interdependent – crucial roles to play in leadership for reconciliation.

It's that, in a context of chronic anxiety, the leadership of faithfully discerned, well trained, properly equipped and supported deacons is of critical necessity, but too often overlooked.

And we together need to be engaged in the ministries of diakonia in order to find out who those deacon-leaders are, whom the church can raise up.

We're used to thinking about leadership in terms of presidency over. What if we look to leaders as those who go first? Deacons go first, in many ways:

- They are often first responders
- Liturgically and ministerially, they are the first out the door, calling us with them (Liturgically I think they ought to have a greater role in first gathering the people)
- They are the first at the threshold
- They tend to those who are First in Jesus' own mission – the priority of the poor, the suffering, the hungry, the vulnerable
- They prioritize – that is they put first – the activity of meeting people, with real presence. Face to face. Person to Person relationships characterised by justice and right relationship. And yes I mean that as real presence in a sacramental sense.
- They ensure that justice is done
- Deacons keep the mission of God before the church

Ironically, though deacons *do* a tremendous lot, their ministries aren't about being set aside into a category of being that permits them to 'do' things that nobody else can.

That's one of the reasons why the diaconate is a bit of a puzzle for those who like to think of ministry in terms of instrumentality and presidency.

I hear deacons being asked – and I remember this from my time in the transitional diaconate – what they can 'do' that so-called laypeople can't 'do.' Not much, really.

Deacons call us to BE, to remember who and whose we are, into whose mission we are gifted and propelled.

There is a luminosity to the deacons' ministry – shining light on needs of the world

They remind us – in the words of RC bishop Don Bolen – that charity and justice are functions of word and sacrament.

Deacons tell us what the woundedness of the world is; and what our own woundedness is.

They goad the church away from privilege and ask us to look to where we see other people 'out there' moving away from privilege – those who will be our partners.

The ministry of deacons and the diakonia into which they call all of us, has a huge potential in leadership in the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us. They lead us into hope.

Robert Runcie, addressing the 6<sup>th</sup> Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Nigeria in 1984, spoke – strangely enough – about tensions within the Anglican Communion.

Tensions that were doctrinal, and tensions born of culture and context. Some tensions are so tight that they can be destructive. (Fascia tissue).

And it is precisely at critical points of tension in a body that we need to be reminded that tension – as a force in physics as well as in the human family and the family of God within creation - tension is something that is necessary for creation.

And we, Runcie reminded them and us, we are called into God's mission of re-creation, of transformative, co-creative reconciliation.

To transform destructive tension into creative tension is the call and the capacity of people led by hope.

God, by first reconciling us, equips us with the hope that makes it possible to tend the wounds of the world and to break the cycles of violence that require reconciliation. Hope leads us into lament. And true hope is born in lament.

There is no hope without lament.

Lament: is a cry. A wail of suffering. It is not pretty.

Soelle describes Lament as learning to sing in a minor key. There is a need, she says, for suffering to go beyond “mute pain” to find its voice in a language of lament, of crying, of pain, a language that at least says what the situation is.”

Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole – who has spent half a lifetime immersed in post-conflict reconciliation in Africa, as a Jesuit father – goes further. Music after WWI – response to such suffering – dissonance (Shoenberg and others) was the only way to express the anguish of the trenches.

When dissonance resolves into melody and harmony, there is no sweeter song, no deeper intake and expulsion of musical breath.

Lament can change the heart. Katongole: “It comels a search, strips the heart of pretense, and forces us to wrestle with God.”

Lament gets me out of the way. And makes space for God

By making space for those who are suffering. Touching wounds. Why did Jesus’ post-resurrection body carry wounds? – because wounds carry knowledge that can become wisdom when touched.

We are called to be present to lament. To help to make the space where the lament of the poor and suffering can find and express its voice.

Because lament is both Cry of Anguish and the Silence we hold before pain, where the only response to suffering is presence.

## Hope

Hope is not a solitary endeavour, it only emerges from real presence to suffering. Hope allows us – compels us – to be *real presence* in the world.

Hope then becomes our leader.

Hope steps out first. If love is fire (thank you Michael Curry), hope is momentum.

True hope born from lament is not naïve optimism; it's not an escape; it's not in and of itself the solution (as in “all you have to do is to have hope and everything will be fine”).

It is a gift. It is also a practice (a discipline), a memory and a promise.

Hope, as our leader, reminds us who we are, and Who started all of this in the first place.

Katongole:

“What the church uniquely offers... is the theological grammar of hope. The church's unique calling and mission at the intersection of social brokenness and repair is to be a sacrament of God's ongoing work of social repair. What this means is that the church's life and work at this intersection are not grounded in the conviction that she (the Church) has something to bring, something to give to those who are suffering, but in the conviction that by standing with those who are suffering, she participates in the mystery of God's own suffering, death, and resurrection. It is this participation that mysteriously releases ... a gentle but great force, which does not kill but renews and restores.”

This is the power of hope.

## Summary:

Leadership... *for what:*

God's gift of reconciliation

*where:*

into a world shaped by chronic anxiety

*by whom:*

a reconciled people with a reconciled and reconciling ministry

*following:*

those who compel us out in God's reconciling love to be present to suffering  
to make space for lament, to allow hope to bloom

Questions:

Where do you see diakonia leading?

What would our synod conversations look like, how might our questions be framed, if we were even more intentional about making space to be led by diakonia?

Sabbath: Imagine as Provincial Synod, you corporately take a sabbatical. What might that look like?

What is it to be in a communion of differentiated ministries in this province of dioceses?