

CHAPTER 2

Leading Worship

Presiding

Presiding is an art. The presider's relationship with God, with the other ministers, and with the community are crucial. In tone of voice, posture, gesture, and vesture the presider can enhance the atmosphere of worship. An occasional video recording can help presiders see themselves as others do. Even tape-recordings or a mirror helps, as can a sensitive friend or spouse.

The art of presiding has changed considerably. It requires an intimate knowledge of the liturgy. The presider coordinates the ministries of ushers, those leading music, reading the scriptures, leading the Prayers of the People, serving, preparing the holy table, bringing forward the bread, wine, and offerings, and assisting with administering communion. Some of these tasks were formerly assigned to the presider. They are now rightly shared with others, and it is important that the presider does not repossess them. Presiders also need to take care not to usurp the people's part (including the Amens).

On the other hand communities may need to reflect on their understanding of presiding if the presider is only there to say the Absolution, and Great Thanksgiving (and a blessing), while another (or others) is the real focus of leadership in the service. This can give an impression of magic associated with priesthood rather than the sharing of ministry that such a community actually seeks.

"For the community to celebrate as a unity there needs to be a person who focuses and coordinates the community's action" (page 515). This is the role of the presider: focusing and coordinating. In order to help this sense of focus, there are certain elements which the presider will not usually delegate. These are that the presider greets the people, declares the Absolution, says the Collect of the Day, ordinarily preaches the Sermon, may say the sentence introducing the Prayers of the People ("Let us pray for ... goodness" page 411), and may say a

collect to conclude these Prayers, introduces the Peace, proclaims the Great Thanksgiving, breaks the bread, says the Invitation to communion, is one of the people who administers the Sacrament, leads the Prayer After Communion, and gives a blessing if there is to be one. In the absence of a deacon the presider could maintain this focus by saying the bidding to confession, and the Dismissal. Some tasks normally part of presiding (such as preaching) may be delegated to another.

The bishop at a Eucharist

"Bishops are ... to preside over [the Church's] worshipping life" (page 913). Modern Anglican eucharistic rites in their rubrics or notes agree that it is the bishop's prerogative to preside at the Eucharist. The priest presides in the absence of the bishop. The bishop is responsible for the liturgical formation of clergy and laity in the diocese. The bishop's presiding, then, is to be a model, encouraging the active participation of the people.

The deacon at a Eucharist

A pattern of leadership within the Eucharist which complements that of the presider is provided by the roles traditionally assigned to the deacon. These roles include introducing the confession, proclaiming the Gospel and sometimes preaching, providing leadership for the Prayers of the People, inviting the congregation to exchange the Peace, preparing the holy table and setting the bread and wine upon it, assisting at the elevation at the end of the Great Thanksgiving, helping distribute the bread and wine, and dismissing the congregation.

This book is advocating that many of these tasks be done by lay people. In a community in which there is a deacon, this deacon should not take back all these ministries from the laity but s/he can appropriately be seen as the leader of these diaconal tasks. Deacons can, for example, train and roster people in leading the Prayers of the People, and lead the Prayers themselves on occasion. This leadership of these ministries can be expressed in the service by the deacon

sitting (and standing) immediately to the right of the presider. If there are concelebrating presbyters (priests), they should not usurp the deacon's place. It is preferable to conceive of concelebrating presbyters as being more a part of the assembly rather than giving the impression that they are presiding as a committee.

With the growing renewal and restoration of the diaconate, it is worth reflecting on the integrity of that order. Priests damage this integrity when they dress as deacons rather than as presbyters in the liturgy.

Some Questions

There are some clear views presented here about the changing nature of presiding and the role of the ordained in worship leadership. In what ways are these the same as yours and in what ways different? How important are the differences? Can you identify a list of five points where you would strongly differ as well as five where you would strongly agree with material here and can you think through the arguments for these points of view as if you were talking with the author?